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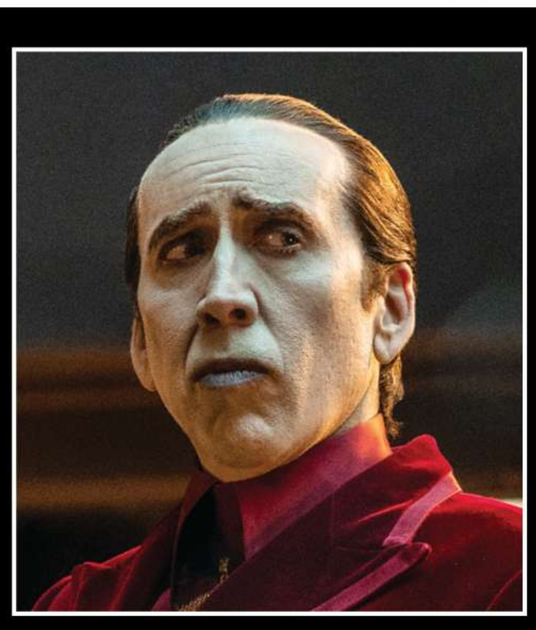

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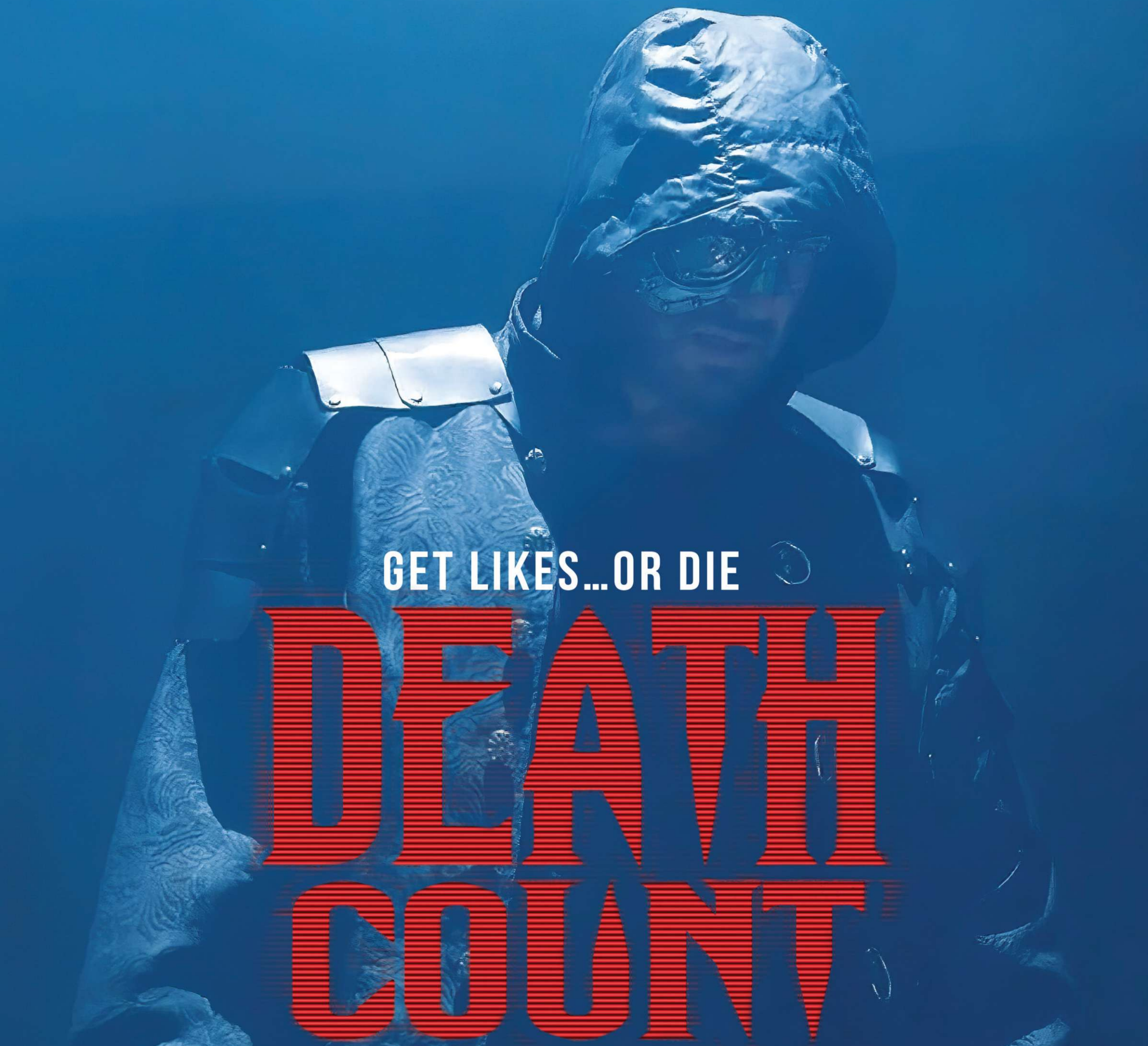

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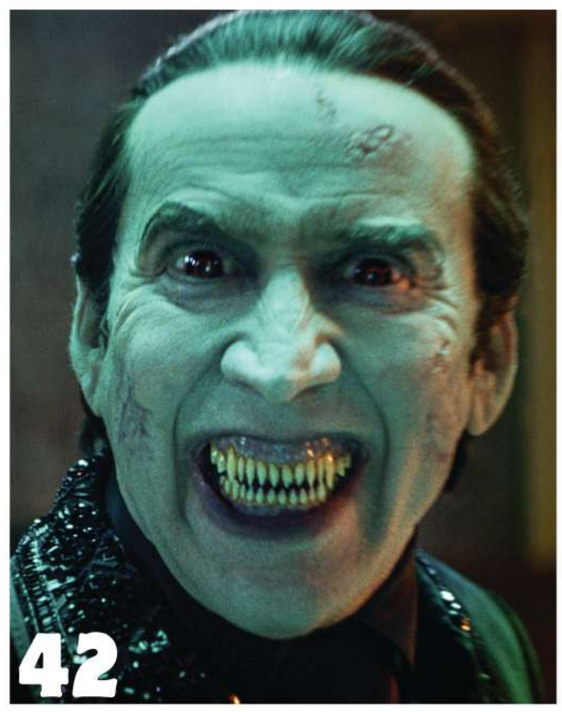

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This issue is dedicated to the great Ricou Browning.

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INVOCATION

Killer Comebacks and Pressing Pause

In horror magazines and websites, there are a lot of words spent criticizing the popular urge to lean back on the familiar, to retreat into existing IPs, and a lot of finger-wagging about how it's maybe a bad or even dangerous thing for culture, for the genre, for art. I have typed a lot of those words myself, and I mostly stand by them. It's exciting to see changes in the space, and if horror stops moving, it'll die just like that shark that always gets used as an analogy in sentences like this one. Confining yourself to looking backward or staying in your comfort zone is, on the whole, not ideal.

But I think at the heart of the "horror as comfort" movement, there are two impulses that are anything but negative. One is our desire for a reassuring narrative. Sure, horror is about confronting the terrifying and going to upsetting emotional places and all that dark goth shit, but behind our love of horror is our need for stories. And we gravitate, no matter how much darkness we surround ourselves with, toward stories that make us feel good.

For horror fans, that often means latching onto the narrative behind the movie. Sometimes that dovetails with the new stuff: the success stories of *Skinamarink* and *Terrifier 2* are owed, at least in part, to the underdog nature of those films, and people rooting for creators to succeed. But more frequently, that itch is scratched by jumping onto the new chapter of an existing narrative. Take this issue (as I assume you already have): the guys who made *The Evil Dead* in 1981 watching as their handmade creation evolves and thrives forty years later? That feels good! Kevin Williamson marveling as the first script he ever sold becomes this monumental pop culture touchstone for multiple generations? That's a beautiful thing. And bearing witness to Nicolas Cage returning not just to genre work, not just to A-list studio roles, but to become only *the seventh actor in 92 years* to play Universal's Dracula? Tell me that doesn't put a smile on your face. This isn't nostalgia; this is people loving a good comeback story.

The other, less navigable impulse, is that we don't want stories to end, or to say goodbye to the things we love. We form attachments and connections; it's human nature to do so. But our time on earth will be marked by the non-optional cessation of those connections, endings that are neither voluntary nor negotiable. Faced with that, we hang onto what we can, and watching *Slumber Party Massacre* over and over, in the end, doesn't hurt anyone.

We (myself included) can all be a little kinder to the fellow horror fan that rewatches their favorite movie again and again; they might be pressing play on a device in order to press pause on the world. We've all been there, or will be eventually.

Phil Nobile Jr., Editor-in-Chief

The Postal Zone

People are always asking us how they can have their writing published in FANGORIA. Here you go!
This is your space to get heard, get loud and get opinionated. Brevity is preferred; having a point of view is required.
Hit us up at **MAIL@FANGORIA.COM**

TAPPING THE WELLS OF GREATNESS

The Outwaters seemed to me to be as close as anyone has come to adapting Algernon Blackwood's iconic short story "The Willows" to the screen. Probably just a coincidence, but I think it would be cool if more aspiring horror filmmakers intentionally dipped into the well of classic horror literature for inspiration. Roger Corman got a lot of mileage out of Edgar Allan Poe's literary clout, but also cranked up Poe's grip on pop culture. I would love to see more team-ups like that in the future.
- Andrew Draper

Excellent idea, Andrew. I think the 2020s could do with a bit more Richard Matheson and Fritz Leiber, myself. - PN

REGION FREE FOR ALL

They just announced that the UK was getting a DVD release of 2022's *Hellraiser*. It makes sense that streamers wouldn't want to release physical versions of their titles since the whole point of owning the rights is to keep viewers subscribing each month, but maybe it's time to grab that Region Free Player. I can't tell if this is a good thing or if we're about to get double-dipped across international borders.

Great news about Hellraiser*! And as a longtime owner of region-free players, I can tell you that the double dip only hurts for a second. - PN*

JUSTICE FOR CUJO

I will always defend Cujo as the goodest boy in horror. Rabies wasn't his fault (get your dogs vaccinated!), and he tried his best to be a Good Dog even as he was losing his faculties, turning away from Brett before fully losing control to the disease. People failed Cujo, he didn't fail them.
- Fisty

Well said, Fisty. Perhaps on this, the film's 40th anniversary, it's time to re-examine cinema's most infamous canine as the tragic antihero he was. (Just don't ask Ms. Wallace...) - PN

FANGO FASHION ADVICE

I have tickets for an upcoming event hosted by the iconic Bruce Campbell, which happens to include a photo op. I've never participated in a photo op before, so I'm coming to FANGORIA for help. Having met him before, I'm aware that Mr. Campbell's suits are legendary. This is not the time for a black T-shirt. How do I match his ensemble energy? Stop me before I make a custom blazer covered in his face. I'll do it.
- Alex Spivey

I feel your pressure, Alex! They say a gentleman's suit should be a silhouette that directs focus to his partner's ensemble, and that dynamic might apply here. Going big to compete with The Chin? I wouldn't attempt it. I think understated and classy is the move here - what about a pocket square with little chainsaws around the hem? No, I don't know where to get that. - PN

CUJO: MANGY MOVIE MONSTER OR MALICIOUSLY MALIGNED MUTT?

MONSTER INVASION

COLD CALL: UNSEEN FORGES FEAR AND FRIENDSHIP

By Brett Gallman

AFTER WORKING ON SHORT FILMS, MUSIC VIDEOS, AND TELEVISION PRODUCTIONS FOR OVER 15 YEARS, YOKO OKUMURA HAS A CLEAR VISION FOR HER CREATIVE ENERGY. DRAWN TO STORIES OF REBELLION AND A CHAMPION OF UNDERREPRESENTED VOICES, SHE "THRIVES IN THE INTERSECTION OF GRIT AND GLAMOUR," ALL NOTIONS THAT REVERBERATE THROUGHOUT HER FEATURE DEBUT *UNSEEN*. WITH THIS BLUMHOUSE PRODUCTION, OKUMURA SAW AN OPPORTUNITY TO CRAFT BOTH A RELENTLESS, CLEVERLY STAGED THRILLER AND SKETCH A TOUCHING PORTRAIT OF A FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN TWO WOMEN AT A CROSSROADS IN THEIR LIVES.

Emily (Midori Francis) is a successful doctor whose relationship with her boyfriend Charlie (Michael Patrick Lane) has gone very south. In a deranged attempt to salvage things after their breakup, he abducts Emily and holds her hostage at his remote Michigan cabin, where her successful escape comes at a crucial cost when her glasses break during the ensuing struggle. Almost completely blind, she staggers into the woods, dials a random number on her phone, and reaches Sam (Jolene Purdy), a Florida convenience store clerk still reeling from the tragic circumstances that landed her at a dead-end gig. Now, she's Emily's lifeline, acting as the blind woman's eyes via Facetime to help her evade her homicidal ex — all while dealing with the retail hell on her end.

When Okumura read Salvatore Cardoni and Brian Rawlins' script for *Unseen*, she was hooked by its premise, particularly the women at its center. "I was immediately drawn to the fact that, at the core of a fun, fast-paced thriller, is a story of two women who build an unlikely friendship and then end up saving each other's lives," she explains. "This is exactly the kind of thing that I want to do: tell personal stories wrapped in a mad fun world of genre."

Unseen specifically falls into the genre of tightly-wound, telephonic nail-biters like *Cellular* and *The Call*, and Okumura was eager to play in a demented sandbox guided by Murphy's Law. She's once again quick to praise Cardoni and Rawlins for generating suspense throughout a script that's teeming with chaos and peril. "I definitely credit them for knowing how to build tension, even with the smallest problems," she raves, referring to the calamitous events that unfold during Sam's shift: a malfunctioning Slurpee machine, a broken

MIDORI FRANCIS (ABOVE) AND JOLENE PURDY MAY NOT SHARE ANY ACTUAL SCREENTIME, BUT THEIR CHARACTERS EMILY AND SAM GO THROUGH THE RINGER TOGETHER.

MISSI PYLE'S CAROL (RIGHT, WITH BRETT BAKER) TAKES "I WOULD LIKE TO SPEAK TO THE MANAGER" TO GUN-TOTING NEW HEIGHTS. SORRY, WE MEAN DEPTHS.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ALYSSA MORAN AND BLUMHOUSE PRODUCTIONS

phone charger, and the mother of all Karens (Missi Pyle). The director also credits the actors for maintaining the film's intensity, noting that they capture an "anxiety we really feel in our hearts" as the situation spirals out of control.

The film's breakneck pace was also a priority, as evidenced by a cold open that allows it to hit the ground running with minimal exposition. "That was actually a decision we made in post-production," Okumura reveals. "We decided this is a movie where you just want to start right away." Doing so creates a disorienting effect because the opening fight between Emily and Charlie "feels like the climax of another movie," allowing *Unseen* to "go full-throttle, high-octane from the start to capture the audience right away." Okumura singles out Lane's intense performance here, crediting him with setting the film's perilous tone. "His capacity to bring that immediate threat level with just his presence says a lot about his skill," she observes, though she's also quick to note that this maniacal bad boyfriend couldn't be further removed from Lane's demeanor. "When you meet him, he's just a happy, warm dude who's excited to be there and collaborate."

Lane's menacing presence is contrasted with the touching relationship that develops between Emily and Sam throughout the ordeal. Okumura admits she was a fan of her lead actresses before they read for *Unseen*, when it became obvious that they were perfect for these roles. "I have loved both Midori and Jolene from their previous work," she says. "But it was really in their auditions, I just knew they'd be a good pair. They have that chemistry, and I knew Midori's intensity and Jolene's warmth was going to be the contrast that would make these two characters dynamic."

During this unconventional production, the lead duo literally went the extra mile in developing their camaraderie even though their characters don't share the screen. While discussing the unique challenges

CHARLIE (MICHAEL PATRICK LANE, WITH FRANCIS) IS AN EX WITH AN AXE TO GRIND.

DIRECTOR YOKO OKUMURA, CENTER, CONSULTS WITH HER STARS (PURDY AND FRANCIS).

“This is exactly the kind of thing that I want to do: tell personal stories wrapped in a mad fun world of genre.”
- Yoko Okumura

posed by this type of film, Okumura insists she remained adamant about keeping these two close. “From the very beginning, we all knew the key challenge of this production would be how to schedule everybody and how to shoot,” she explains. “But I wanted to make sure the actors had the opportunity to actually do scenes together. They weren’t just talking to a reader or a recording because that was not going to build that relationship.”

She commends the actresses for being so selfless and embracing this unique challenge. “Midori and Jolene, they’re both very giving actors, so they were eager to be there for each other, even if it wasn’t their side of the movie,” she offers. “We started shooting the forest scenes with Midori first, and Jolene came out and was there alongside Midori, reading the lines off-screen. She had to sneak around behind the camera and be in there physically with us so that they got to hear each other’s voices, and they got to actually react to each other in real-time.”

Okumura also heaps praise upon Pyle, who acts as the fly in the ointment as Carol, an aggrieved customer at Sam’s store. The “Florida Man” stereotype has been etched into our cultural lexicon, and Pyle’s turn here makes the case that “Florida Woman” should be just as infamous. Oozing with entitlement and condescension, she barrels into *Unseen*, harnessing the film’s chaotic energy in the form of a gun-toting blowhard that Pyle was eager to bring to the screen. “She is just a master, and we had so much footage of Missy because she improvised so much amazing material,” Okumura reveals. However, the director had to be judicious here because she wanted to maintain firm control of the film’s tone. “We had to practice restraint and kill some darlings. It was a delicate balance since I wanted to make sure that she feels like a villain.”

Balancing contrasts was a theme throughout production, necessitated by the film’s dichotomous nature: two women with distinct personalities fending off wildly different challenges in disparate locations. Okumura was up to the challenge, though, and tackled it with a unique, bold vision that embraces tonal and visual contrasts, allowing Emily’s naturalistic, woodsy escape to clash with Sam’s neon-soaked, gator-themed convenience store crucible. “That contrast was intentionally built, even the interior of the gas station, we put fake forestry to build this contrast. It was really important for us to make sure that even a movie about two people on a phone would be visually stimulating,” she states.

In other words, *Unseen* operates right in Okumura’s self-described wheelhouse, giving her a chance to indulge those creative whims of blending grit and glamour. “On every movie, I try to put my directorial stamp on it. And I love to look at beautiful, colorful things, and then throw blood or dirt on them,” she observes before reminding me of her other imperative. “I like to see colorful people with marginalized perspectives thrown into these dramatic situations and taking the audience on a fun journey,” something she’s especially grateful to do on her feature debut. “I was able to make this movie my own: it’s quite personal to me, and has a style that really reflects me. But on top of that, I got to cast two Japanese American women as the leads of a Blumhouse thriller, which is this mind-blowing little miracle.” 💀

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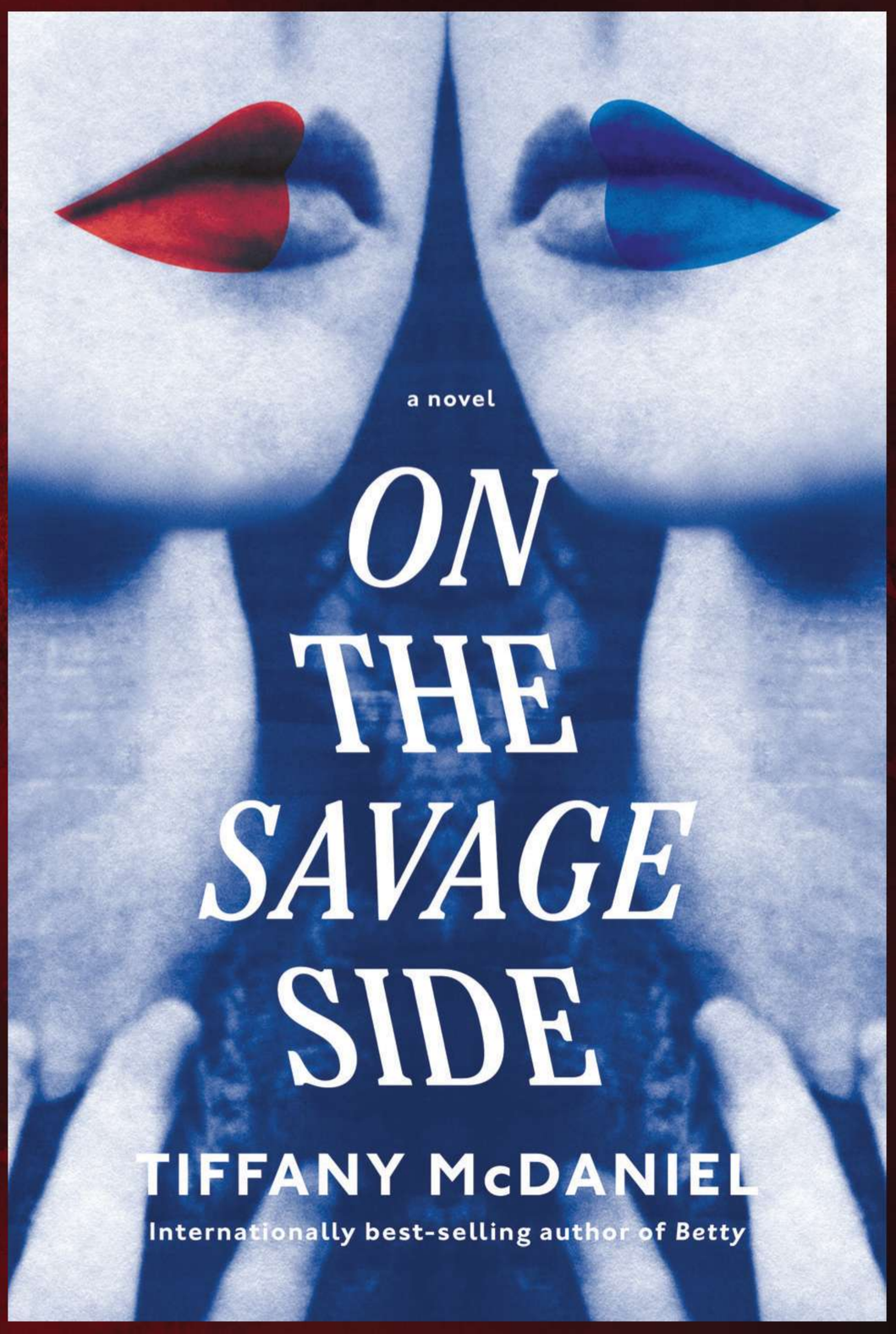

Michael Gingold's

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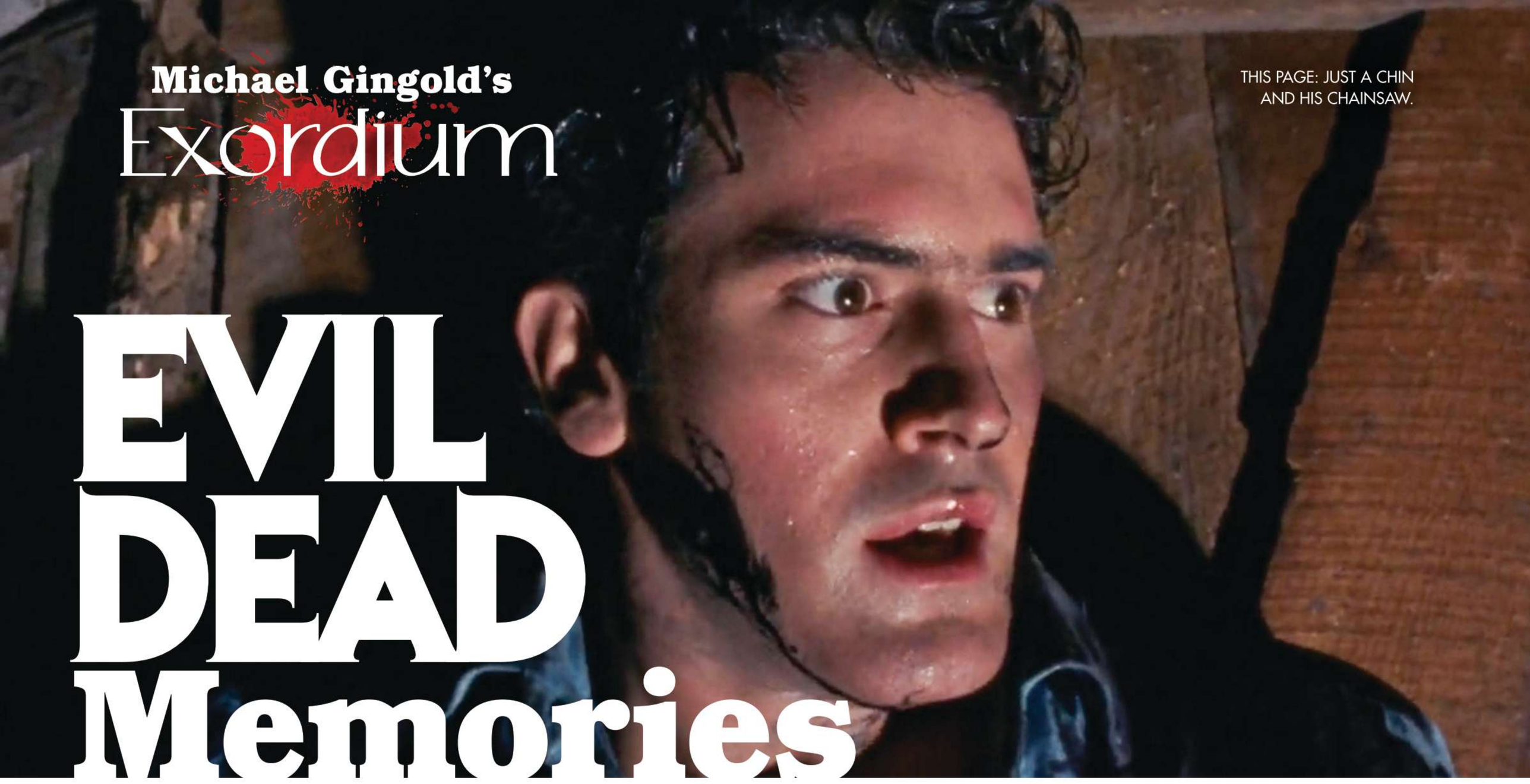


THIS PAGE: JUST A CHIN AND HIS CHAINSAW.

EVIL DEAD Memories

Back in the days before trailers premiered and became accessible any time online, part of the fun of going to the movies was anticipating what previews you might catch before the main feature. And if you were a diehard film fan, like I was from my early teens, you could try to determine which ones you'd see based on the distributor of the movie being shown, who would presumably attach coming attractions for their own product. (You could still be surprised, though; I remember going to Martin Scorsese's *The King of Comedy* and being knocked out of my seat by a spectacular *Return of the Jedi* trailer at its head.)

So when a friend and I attended a Saturday matinee of *Xtro* in late January 1983, I thought we might be treated to a preview of *The Evil Dead*, knowing that both hailed from New Line Cinema. And indeed we were — but we weren't quite prepared for what we saw. I can't recall if there was a red band at the top of that *Evil Dead* trailer, but what was for sure was that it went way beyond the typical horror previews at the time, which could only hint at or present the setups for the grisly highlights. This one gave us blood dripping from axes and on faces, explosions of gore from one of the possessed characters, and bits of the startling climactic stop-motion decompositions. There was no narration, or attempt to summarize the plot, just a barrage of quick, scary excerpts, including enough of Sam Raimi's hurtling camera shots to let us know this would be more in-your-face than anything we'd seen before.

You could feel the largely teenage audience getting seriously rocked by those two minutes, and poor *Xtro* just couldn't compete. As we left the theater, all my pal and I could talk about was how we absolutely, positively *had* to see *The Evil Dead* opening night. The fact that it was going out unrated, with a "No One Under 17" (which we both were) restriction, was not about to stop us.

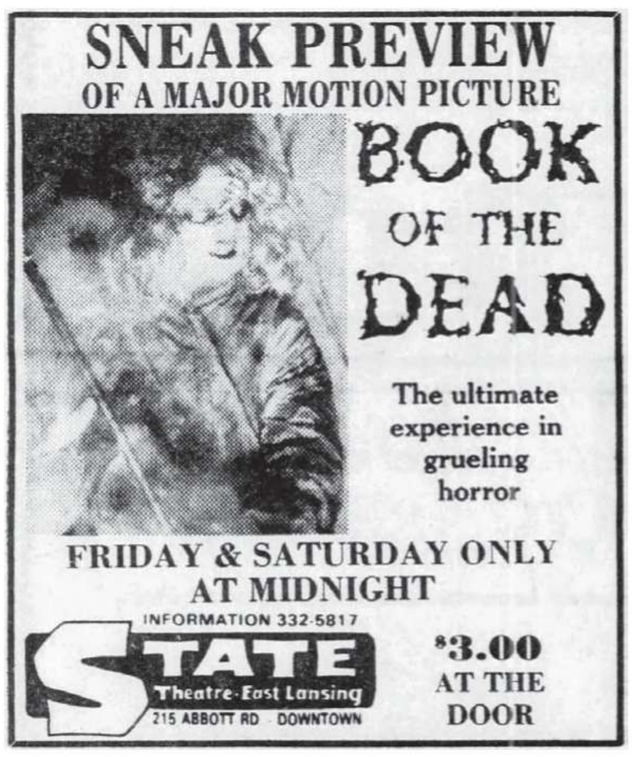
As it happened, we'd have to hold out for a little while before that release — which was OK, since I'd already been waiting for *The Evil Dead* since the previous fall. That was when I picked up the November 1982 issue of *The Twilight Zone Magazine*, in which no less than Stephen King wrote of discovering "the most ferociously original horror film of 1982" at the Cannes Film Festival earlier that year. "*In Evil Dead*," he wrote, "the camera has the kind of nightmarish fluidity that we associate with the early John Carpenter; it dips and slides and then zooms in so fast you want to plaster your hands over your eyes." (It must be said that it's kind of funny to read a comment about "early John Carpenter" from 1982.) King also included some quotes from Raimi about the movie's production, and a lament that the film had yet to land American distribution. "The latest to pass," he noted, "was Paramount, which distributed the hugely successful — if brainless — *Friday the 13th*."

That situation didn't last long once King's article got around. New Line Cinema, which had recently brought *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* back to theaters, snapped up *The Evil Dead*, and they weren't the only ones to notice. Before the year was out, FANGORIA featured *The Evil Dead* on the cover of issue #23 — only the second time a fright feature of this grassroots nature had been spotlighted that way — heralding an interview with Raimi, Bruce Campbell and Rob Tapert. A follow-up item in issue #26 reported on the New Line deal, musing of

40-ODD YEARS LATER, AND STILL NO ONE'S HAD A BAD DAY QUITE LIKE SCOTTY.

that company and Raimi, "Perhaps we are seeing here the birth of two notable horror providers who will scare audiences for years to come." Fango editor Bob Martin became a major booster of the movie, introducing a story on its effects team in #27 with, "*Evil Dead* is 90 minutes of dynamite, a horror film which deserves every bit of the success that it seems destined to attain... Since I started editing this magazine, I have not seen *any* new film that I could recommend to our readers with more confidence that it would be loved, embraced and hailed as a new milestone in graphic horror."

It was a happy ending for Raimi and co., and the end of a long road that began with principal photography rolling in December 1979 and continued to a Detroit premiere in October '81, followed by midnight shows in nearby Lansing the following month, under the title *Book of the Dead*. New Line initially scheduled March 4, '83 for the beginning of *The Evil Dead*'s regional U.S. theatrical release, and ultimately began it in the New York City area on April 15. My buddy and I, sure enough, were there at a suburban cinema on opening night (and got in with no problem), and the movie blew us away, just as we hoped it would. From Raimi's relentless camerawork to the onslaught of graphic gore, it sent us out of the theater shaking, and we went back to see it a second time the following weekend. In my Xerox fanzine *Scareaphanalia*, then only five issues old, I described it as "a headlong, visceral, nightmarish horror tale that doesn't let up for a minute" — and I meant every word of that hyperbole.



Needless to say, the mainstream critics of the time largely didn't see it that way. The only reviewer for any of the NYC daily papers who bothered to cover *The Evil Dead* on opening day was Archer Winsten of the *New York Post* (fun fact: This was the edition that sported the infamous headline "Headless Body in Topless Bar"), who wrote, "Horror addicts who gobble up this dish of gore and disgust are hereby notified that this is their *piece de resistance*. All others, beware!" There were a few scattered raves, from the likes of the *Los Angeles Times*' Kevin Thomas ("Unquestionably it's an instant classic, probably the grisliest well-made movie ever") and *Variety*'s "Lor," a.k.a. Lawrence Cohn ("Raimi maintains suspense and a nightmarish mood in between the showy outbursts of special effects gore").

But most of the reactions were on the order of Ted Mahar's in *The Oregonian*: "*The Evil Dead* isn't just a crudely executed attempt at emetic cinema but is also shamelessly derivative." Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert put the movie down on their *At the Movies* show (though they did not, as Raimi has recalled, relegate it to "Dog of the Week" status). My favorite pan appeared in the *Arkansas Gazette*: "This turkey gobbles so loudly that every Honeysuckle White and Butterball in this part of the United States must be startled into activity every time the projectionist cranks up another go-'round for *Evil Dead*."

Raimi and co. had the last laugh, though. After the disappointment of the much-interfered-with *Crimewave*, they rebounded with *Evil Dead II* — though I must admit, I didn't get what they were going for during the first act of the sequel. *The Evil Dead* had had such a frightening impact that the more anarchically comedic tone of *II* had me a little confused about how intentional the humor was — until it arrived at the possessed-hand sequence, at which point I got what the director was going for and had a fun old time with the rest. The college-critics' screening where I saw *Evil Dead II* was also my initial meeting and interview with Raimi... and I do believe I was the first to query him about the definition of a "fake Shemp."

Since then, *The Evil Dead* has become part of the pantheon of enduring horror greats, a massively influential and unique franchise (it is, in its first three entries anyway, one of the only post-'70s genre film series united by its hero rather than its villain). Even without Raimi at the helm and Campbell in the lead, the duo and Tapert, as producers, found the right filmmakers to continue the legacy in 2013's remake and the new *Evil Dead Rise*. Sitting down to watch the latter in preparation for my coverage this issue took me back to first witnessing "the ultimate experience in grueling horror" 40 years ago — and even further back to seeing its trailer, and getting excited for the spectacularly gruesome sights it promised. 💀

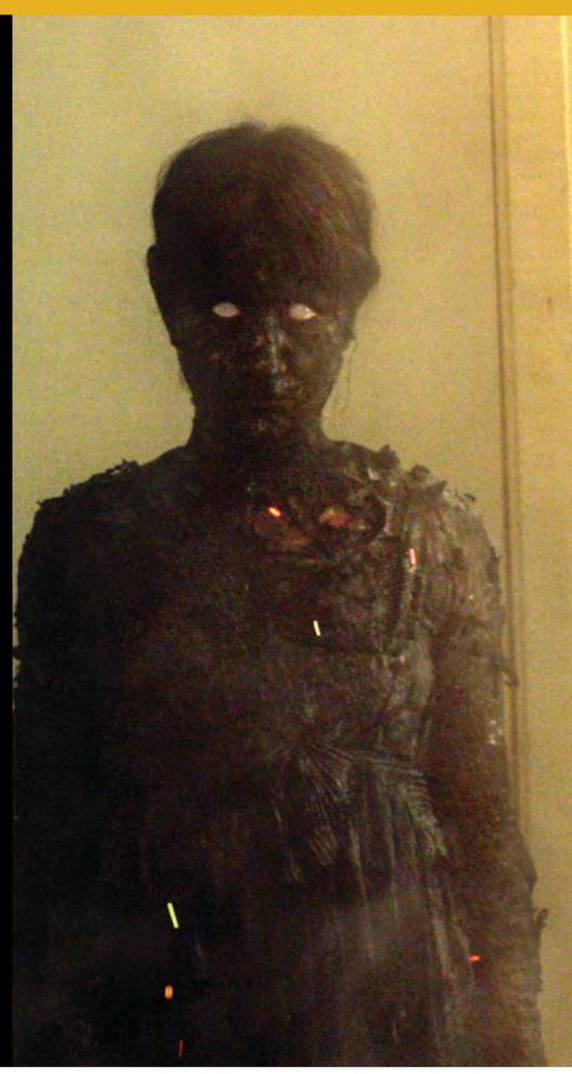
GOODNIGHT, SWEETHEART: LINDA'S GRUESOME DEMISE IS JUST ONE WAY THE *EVIL DEAD* EARNED ITS FANGO REVIEW HAILING IT "A NEW MILESTONE IN GRAPHIC HORROR."

SceneQueen

TED AND I ARE STILL HERE

THE CO-STAR OF TED GEOGHEGAN'S 2015 HAUNTED HOUSE SHOCKER *WE ARE STILL HERE* GOES DEEP WITH THE DIRECTOR ABOUT HIS NEWEST FILM, *BROOKLYN 45*.

BY BARBARA CRAMPTON



I've known filmmaker Ted Geoghegan many years, a relationship that was solidified when he directed me on his film *We Are Still Here*. Ted is a deeply feeling individual and storyteller. His movies resonate with grief and loss and often depict cultural malice corrected by revenge. In real life, be it on social platforms or charities he raises money for, the persona he projects is clear to those who know him well: Be kind, be tolerant, be supportive. I have few friends as good as Ted.

The way artists communicate in life comes through in their work; we can sense the filmmaker within the film. This is true of performers, as well: I make a big effort to warm up a room and disarm those I meet. I like to give space to others around me to shine and feel seen. I ask a lot of questions. I think my characters often reflect that.

Now that I've seen three features by Ted, and have witnessed how he operates in life, a pattern is clear: Ted believes passionately in equality, tolerance, love and belonging. He calls out abuse and injustice, whether it's big or small, onscreen or off. Ted is a steward for the righteous and true. He is humble, helpful and a great friend, who supports others in personal distress or in the splendor of celebration.

Another thing about Ted Geoghegan? He loves horror.

His latest, *Brooklyn 45*, shows how good people can be blinded by hate even in the face of facts. It's about how we change the narrative to justify our actions based on loyalty and friendships, furthering the notion of "us vs. them."

It's 1945. WWII has just ended, and in Brooklyn, New York, Colonel Clive Hockstatter has invited his friends from the war over for drinks. But his real reason for the gathering has a deeper purpose. His wife has committed a heinous act and the colonel is suffering deeply. He also has a secret, one to be revealed as the story unfolds. It's an excellent cast headed by indie horror maestro Larry Fessenden as the Colonel. Prolific actress Anne Ramsay, Jeremy Holm, Kristina Klebe, Ron E. Rains and chameleon Ezra Buzzington round out the players.

I asked Ted where the origin of the movie came from and was surprised by his response. "It was actually inspired

ABOVE: DIRECTOR TED GEOGHEGAN LOVES TO SUMMON A GHOST. LEFT: THE EPHEMERAL PHANTASM OF *BROOKLYN 45*.

RIGHT: A RATHER MORE BARBECUED SPECTER IN *WE ARE STILL HERE*.

SEANCES ARE A MESSY BUSINESS. PROCEED WITH CAUTION.

by the séance scene in *We Are Still Here*. Audiences really responded to that scene. They thought it was cool to see these middle-aged people conducting a séance, as opposed to dopey teenagers. People kept bringing it up, so I decided my next movie would be a whole séance. The entire thing's in real-time, and takes place over 85 very tense minutes."

One thing that binds all three of Ted's films together is that they each take place in the past: *We Are Still Here* in 1979, *Mohawk* in 1814, and his latest in 1945, a period he says, "hadn't really been represented that much. Postwar America is such an interesting time because historically it's remembered as everyone coming home and being so happy and relieved. We all think of that sailor kissing the girl in Times Square, but in reality, the people returned from the frontlines and were incredibly damaged. Suicides were at an all-time high."

Brooklyn 45 is an incredibly complex and thoughtful film that examines the depths of war and how far we can go to protect the truth even from ourselves. But the most important aspect Ted wanted to accomplish here? "I'm very political, but I tried to have the movie be apolitical, and have the characters speak for themselves. I want anti-war pacifists to sit down to it and say, 'Wow, this is a lot deeper than I thought.' I also want military veterans to watch the film and think, 'Yes, this is a very nuanced version of what people go through during war.'"

Ted knew what he wanted the larger points of the story to be, but he was having trouble with the specifics of the wartime story. He sent the first act to his father, Michael Geoghegan, an Air Force veteran and US history teacher, who offered input on the factual elements of the script.

"My dad helped me with the reality of what happens to people in war, and suddenly all the characters were real. I wrote the second and third acts in two weeks. We then sent the script back and forth six or seven times, and my dad would add and subtract factual bits throughout. When we finally got to a place where he felt like it was authentic, I asked if he wanted a co-writing credit. He declined and said he would just take a 'thanks.' We hung up the phone that morning and then… he died."

Michael had been paralyzed in an auto accident in his early 20s, losing all sensation below his neck. During the time Michael spent in the VA hospital after his accident in 1971, he had time to talk to numerous vets from the Vietnam War.

Ted says, "My father heard from all these guys who were in such pain for having killed people during the war. They would say, 'I'm going to hell, I'm a demon, I'm a monster.' My dad asked them particulars of what happened and details about their battles, and a lot of those stories informed what my characters say and do in our film. It was the heat of battle and they were commanded to do something wrong… to kill. I feel, for me, my movie asks its audience, 'Are we the sum of all the things that happen in our lives or the sum of one thing that defines us forever?' Meanwhile, its characters ask themselves the same thing."

I was very moved to hear how Ted worked so intimately with his dad on the script, and he dedicates the film to Michael Geoghegan's memory. *Brooklyn 45* premiered at the 2023 SXSW Film Festival, and will begin streaming on Shudder June 9th.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF IFC FILMS

I WON'T HAVE WHAT THEY'RE HAVING: RITUAL ATTENDEES LARRY FESSENDEN, ANNE RAMSAY AND RON E. RAINS GOT MORE THAN THEY ORDERED.

Stephen Graham Jones'

SLASHER NATION

SLASHER, INCUBATE THYSELF

In *Terror Train*, it's three years after the initial prank that the revenge killings start. *Prom Night* waits six years to serve up its disco brand of justice. With *Happy Birthday to Me*, it's two years. *Silent Night, Deadly Night*: thirteen years. *The House on Sorority Row*: twenty-two years. *My Bloody Valentine*: twenty years. *Sleepaway Camp*: eight years. *Slaughter High*: ten years. This delay, this gap, this waiting period, would seem to be built into the slasher, wouldn't it? Definitely part of the formula, anyway.

Sure, Pamela Voorhees dispatches Barry and Claudette the year after Jason drowns in Crystal Lake, but that's just a knee-jerk response – it'll be over two decades before she carves through the next batch of camp counselors. *In A Nightmare on Elm Street*, Freddy, ever patient, always scheming, waits thirteen years to come for the children of the mob who burned him, but for *The Prowler*, which waits three and a half decades, Freddy's a little too eager, isn't he? To *Pieces*, though, which waits forty years, it's *The Prowler* who's pulling the trigger (um, wielding that pitchfork) a little early.

But that's the Golden Age, you might say. *Halloween* set the mold in 1978 when it waited fifteen years to bring Michael back for some stabby trick 'r treat action. It stands to reason that all the slashers would take that waiting period as gospel, and line themselves up with it accordingly.

Even when the next round of slashers starts in 1996, though, there's still that waiting period. It's just a bit more compressed now, at least initially. In *Scream*, there's only a bit more than a year between Maureen Prescott breaking up Billy Loomis' family (as Billy sees it) and the Ghostface killings. *Urban Legend* also waits a year and change. So does *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (it's right there in the title).

The slashers of the late '90s and early '00s didn't all retaliate against their pranks (or trespasses, or inciting incidents…) that fast, though. *Cherry Falls* gets going twenty-five years before these current killings, which is longer than the victim pool's been alive. *Valentine* waits at least ten years, and probably more like Freddy's thirteen: long enough for the characters to go from middle school to post–graduate work.

And, of course, there are exceptions. The waiting period might be part of the formula, but it isn't any kind of "rule," and, even if it were, do you think the slasher's going to always color within the lines? The killing response time in *Graduation Day*, say, is nearly immediate – but not quite as immediate as in *The Hitcher*. More recently, in *Joy Ride*, Rusty Nail's got time to kill, and shifts into high gear right away. But the most revealing exceptions of the post-*Scream* era share a build: *Final Destination* and *It Follows*.

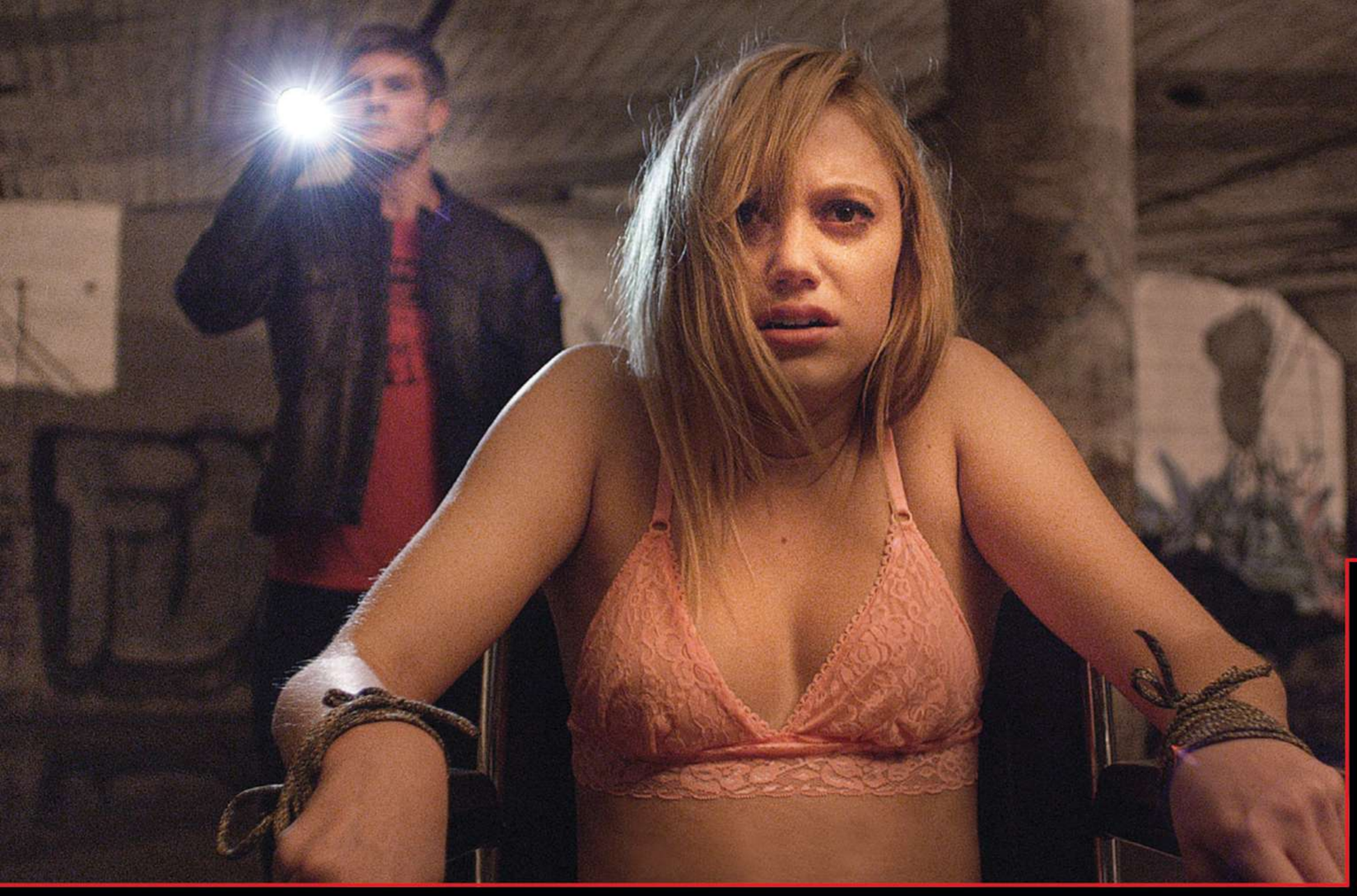
In the first, the "prank" is cheating death, and in the second it's having sex with someone definitely trying to pass this haunted VHS tape on to the next person. Of note with these two is that both feature sort of nebulous killers: Death for *Final Destination*, calling in its pre–ordained markers, and, with *It Follows*… we never quite know, do we? But, like Death, it would seem to be if not eternal, then at the very least a very persistent demonic or cosmic infection humans have been dealing with for some time, *Smile*-style.

The question, then, has got to be: why, assuming they're not just rule-breakers, can *Final Destination* and *It Follows* both be slashers and *not* pack that waiting period in?

I submit that it's because their respective killers don't need time to plot their revenge. They already are what they are, they do what they do, thus they don't need that incubation period to fester into a killing machine. Specifically, a *revenge-driven* killing machine. Think about it: in *Terror Train*, Kenny, after suffering that terrible prank, doesn't just retreat from showing his face around town; he burrows back into *his own head*, as does Marty in *Slaughter High*. As do nearly all of them.

You know how an oyster will lick an invasive speck into a pearl over the years, until it's got something shiny to show us? It's the same with the victims of these

BIDING THEIR TIME (THIS PAGE AND FACING): HARRY WARDEN, *THE PROWLER* AND THE FISHERMAN ARE OKAY WITH A DELAY, AS IS DEATH ITSELF (AS KRISTEN CLOKE LEARNS IN *FINAL DESTINATION*).



THE *IT FOLLOWS* DEMON IS PERHAPS THE MOST PATIENT KILLER OF ALL, MUCH TO MAIKA MONROE'S CHAGRIN.

pranks: in their time out of the story's limelight, they nurse their various wounds until those injuries metastasize into an all-consuming rage. The time off isn't a waiting period – it's an incubation chamber. These prank victims, when they finally emerge, have also become victims of their own rage, which gets expressed as revenge, and the shiny thing they show us are their victims' insides.

Over the intervening years since the prank, they've had time to scheme, to plot, to plan. To work their way into the confidences they need to operate, to pull this unlikely thing off. If they came for the offending parties – the pranksters – the morning after the Bad Thing happened, then how do we even make sense of that? They're still hurting, would just be lashing out, would get slapped down immediately.

Also, without that waiting period, where's the mystery, right? Without all this time passing between the prank and the cycle of violence, how do we rationalize the offending parties not immediately figuring out who's behind the mask? Without the time between the prank and the revenge-driven killings, then the eventual reveal, where the killer loses their mask and monologues about all the injustice they've suffered – it's got no punch, does it?

No, both we, the slasher audience, and the slasher itself, need these years between. They're vital.

Unless that spirit of justice, out to balance the scales of the world with many, many pounds of flesh, not only has no arc, but is fundamentally *incapable* of having an arc. Death in *Final Destination* isn't going to change. This demonic STD in *It Follows* has been what it is for… forever, maybe. Neither of them needs to incubate into their killer selves. "Killer selves" is all they are. So, due to his treatment, is Daniel Robitaille in *Candyman*: the crime committed against him was seventy or eighty years ago, but he almost immediately stepped into urban legend, as a presence not unlike Death or the demonic STD. Just, he's a little more hands-on with it all.

And you've probably noticed by now that I'm limiting this to revenge-slashers (which some call "mystery slashers"). There is another variety, though: the mad-dog slasher, where the killer's out there slashing just because that's what they do, that's who they are. But note that these mad-dog slashers don't really have pranks that start this cycle of violence. In *Slumber Party Massacre*, there's an inciting incident, sure – a pair of them, really, the perfect storm of a slumber party and an escaped killer – but there's no "reason" for the killings. Or *StageFright* (the 1987 one), where Irving Wallace is just doing what he does. His motivation isn't that he's a former actor killing actors. That's just what allows him to operate within this production, in this theater.

And, what of *Intruder*, right? *Night School*? Not going to say that those aren't slashers, I think they probably are – being inclusive is always better than being exclusive – but the revenge element in each of them is a lot closer to that of a giallo, isn't it? In *Intruder*, killing off the store's employees simply because of a business deal almost feels Scooby-Doo-ish, and dispatching people for a romantic compulsion… where's the "prank" in that? What's the injustice being righted?

However, it's not the Golden Age anymore, and it's no longer the late '90s boom, either. *Happy Death Day*'s for sure a slasher, but it's a lot more like *Night School* than *Friday the 13th*, motivation-wise. *Promising Young Woman*, then? *Terror Train* and *Prom Night* might have a higher body count, but the dynamic's the same: in order to dispense her brand of justice, Cassandra stepped away to incubate into her vengeful self, and get her mask on straight. And in *Sick*, this cycle of violence is constrained by the front end of the pandemic, meaning the "waiting period" is negligibly short. It's wonderfully immediate.

Freaky's something of an outlier, though, isn't it? It follows more the *Child's Play* build, where most of the killings are driven by a rush to inhabit this or that body before time runs out.

That's the great thing with the slasher, though: it's so elastic, has so many permutations, can express its violent justice in a seemingly endless variety of ways. But the message is usually the same: Be better? *Please?* Treat those not as entitled as you with more compassion? Consider the consequences of your actions for *all* involved?

If you don't, well… the slasher's got a variety of ways to deal with you. And, by the time it does, you'll have likely forgotten what it was you did. Which, really, just makes it all that much sweeter when you get yours.

So, be good, people. You never know what's going to stand up on your back trail, or *when* that's going to happen.

Which is kind of the beauty of it all. 💀

FANGORIA COLORS OF THE DARK

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BY BRETT GALLMAN

A LONG TIME AGO IN A GALAXY... NOT ALL THAT FAR AWAY, ADAM DRIVER DELIVERS ANOTHER HEAVYWEIGHT PERFORMANCE IN A NEW SCI-FI EPIC.

BECK AND WOODS' 65 GETS BACK TO PREHISTORIC BASICS

THE CREATORS OF A *QUIET PLACE* AND *HAUNT* SEND ADAM DRIVER AND ARIANA GREENBLATT BACK IN TIME TO HAUNT A NOT-QUIET PLACE.

DIRECTORS SCOTT BECK AND BRYAN WOODS SET OUT TO ANSWER THE VERY COMPELLING QUESTION: "WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME DINOSAURS WERE SCARY?"

PHOTOS BY PATTI PERRET AND COURTESY OF CTMG, INC. / CONCEPT ART COURTESY OF RAIMI PRODUCTIONS

Following their breakthrough hit *A Quiet Place*, Scott Beck and Bryan Woods faced a question that inevitably haunts anyone who's suddenly thrust into the spotlight: "What's next?" Fresh from their latest scoring session for *65*, the duo reveals they were careful in crafting their response and ultimately trusted that audiences would continue to crave original work. "When *A Quiet Place* found an audience, there was an immediate pressure," Woods muses. "Is there a sequel? Are there other cool properties we can do?"

However, Woods and his filmmaking partner saw an opportunity to carve their niche in a Hollywood landscape littered with sequels and comic book movies. "It's so cool that an audience responded to something that they had never heard of before," Woods continues. "We decided we should just go back to our writing cave and try to write something else that wasn't necessarily based on IP." Like many filmmakers of their generation, Beck and Woods consider 1999 to be the halcyon days of Hollywood, a time when new films and new voices were able to flourish. "1999 was such a great year for original voices and storytellers, so we're desperately trying to get back to that," Woods asserts.

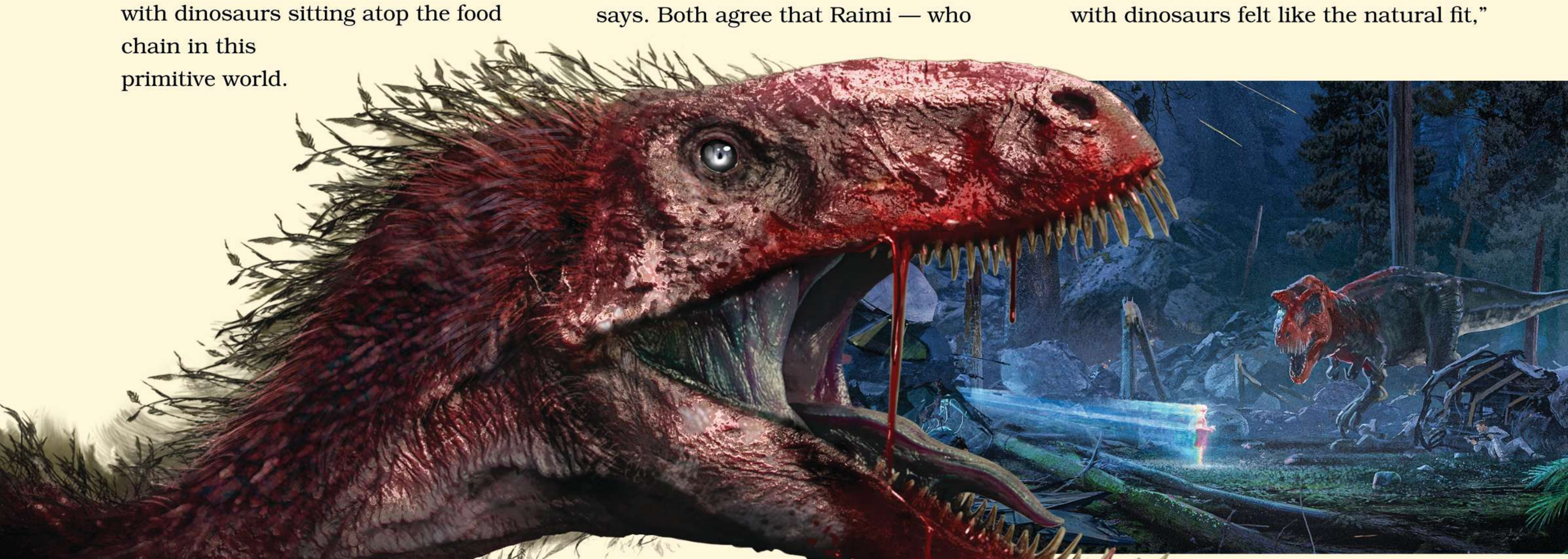
After three years of development and production, Beck and Woods have emerged from their cave with *65*, a sci-fi horror hybrid that marks their most ambitious project to date. Set 65 million years ago, it finds intergalactic pilot Mills (Adam Driver) crash landing on prehistoric Earth, where he and young Koa (Ariana Greenblatt) must survive an extremely hostile terrain ruled by an assortment of predators, with dinosaurs sitting atop the food chain in this primitive world.

A familiar face came aboard to help bring this original vision to life: producer Sam Raimi, who brought a lifetime of filmmaking wisdom to *65*. It's Beck and Woods' second collaboration with the icon following *50 States of Fright*, and the pair raves about the experience, confirming what so many other collaborators have said. "Sam's one of the nicest human beings," Beck glows as he describes what makes Raimi a great producer. "He loves looking at and talking through the script. He would ask us questions about our directing instincts or what the purpose of a certain scene is and expound upon it."

Woods backs up his partner, noting that Raimi "supports the filmmaker's vision but also has great ideas" before the duo elaborates on his involvement, which began at the pitch stage with *65*. "He encouraged us to put all the visual ideas that we could into a presentation so when we went out to studios with the script, there was a holistic visual approach to what the movie could be," Woods says. Both agree that Raimi — who has championed voices as diverse as indie upstart J.R. Bookwalter to Hong Kong maverick John Woo — deserves to be recognized as one of the industry's great producers. "He's been a huge guiding force throughout the journey and is a great champion for filmmakers," Woods notes.

Beck and Woods' pitch for *65* hinged on a simple question: "When was the last time dinosaurs were scary?" To answer that question, the duo returned to their childhood encounter with *Jurassic Park*, which became an obvious influence on this production. "*Jurassic Park* was the most amazing film when we were 9 years old," Beck fondly recalls. "So how do we get back to that magic?" Accomplishing that feat involved embracing the primal terror of the prehistoric beasts. "Leaning into the genre of horror and suspense with dinosaurs felt like the natural fit,"

> "LEANING INTO THE GENRE OF HORROR AND SUSPENSE WITH DINOSAURS FELT LIKE THE NATURAL FIT."
> – SCOTT BECK



MILLS (DRIVER) AND KOA (ARIANA GREENBLATT) ARE BRINGING A NEW RIPLEY AND NEWT DYNAMIC TO THE SCREEN.

Beck elaborates. "How do you make something terrifying? Imagine it's 65 million years ago when dinosaurs were running amok." Woods chimes in here, adding that *65* represents a natural continuation of their preoccupation with the elemental horror of terrifying ordeals unfolding in desolate locations. "We love survival stories, and there's a survivalist element in *65* — it's a very simple man versus nature premise," he offers, citing Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* and Steven Spielberg's *Duel* as formative influences.

Because *65* is a natural follow-up in this respect, Beck and Woods are adamant that its bigger scale didn't fundamentally change their approach to storytelling. While they acknowledge the effects-heavy nature of the production posed unique challenges, the film's human, emotional core was always their first priority. "It's a big canvas movie for us," Beck admits. "On one hand, it's this big dinosaur film, but it's also a character-driven piece, which was equally important to us in writing it. The dream was to do a minimalist movie in the maximalist genre." Woods agrees, adding that the goal with *65* was to "tell an intimate story about grief with this massive backdrop."

The two are especially thrilled to have Adam Driver along to realize that human dimension, something they hoped for but didn't exactly expect when hatching *65*. "When we were writing the script, we asked ourselves if we could get Adam Driver," Beck explains before acknowledging their doubts. "No, no, we can't. We didn't ever necessarily think that, even though we shot for the stars." Their big swing paid off, bringing Driver and his unique screen presence to the film. "He's one of the greatest actors of his generation," Woods insists. "He's a great chameleon who's always taking on different roles. He changes his physicality in really impressive technical ways and makes personal choices that are specific to him." Beck also compliments Driver's range and believes it made him ideal for a role that's both physically and emotionally demanding. "There's a physical sense of Adam as an action star, but there's also a vulnerability underneath that's incredible."

That vulnerability proves to be especially crucial when Mills forges a bond with Koa, the child who's navigating this wilderness with him. Beck and Woods cast a wide net in their search for an actress before selecting Ariana Greenblatt. "We wanted to do a worldwide search, and we didn't want to limit ourselves to Hollywood actors," Woods reveals. "And it's hilarious because we ended up with Ariana, who was in Los Angeles all along." The duo couldn't be mad about this twist of fate, though, since Greenblatt brought a wealth of experience to the film. "She was 11 or 12, and she already had a longer list of credits than us," Woods says with a laugh. "What won us over with Ariana, aside from her emotional range and her ability to be immersed in a scene, was her great physicality. She wasn't afraid of the stunt work and was really excited to run around. She's a very brave young girl."

The dynamic between Driver and Greenblatt inevitably draws comparisons to *Aliens*, and the duo acknowledges Cameron's sequel as an influence, going so far as to screen it on-set during production. "There's something incredible about *Aliens*, this movie about Marines shooting a bunch of monsters, but, at the same time, there's a core emotional story with Ripley and Newt," Beck claims. "That's certainly an influence we could never shy away from." However, Beck and Woods were just as cautious about getting too wrapped up in homage and diminishing the film's originality. "We do our best to add something new to the genre because the biggest sin we're always afraid to commit is delivering the same thing that's already been seen and not changing it," Beck says before offering some crucial insight into the team's approach. "We try to inject a piece of each of us into the material, and that's what we fall back on to make sure that, even if it's a big action, suspense, or horror movie concept, there's something with the characters that rings true." 💀

PHOTOS BY PATTI PERRET AND COURTESY OF CTMG, INC. / CONCEPT ART COURTESY OF RAIMI PRODUCTIONS

AIN'T NOTHING QUIET ABOUT THIS PLACE: BECK, DRIVER, AND WOODS ON SET.

The Devil Goes Down Under in GODLESS

THE EASTFIELD EXORCISM

Director Nick Kozakis and his cast aren't delivering your typical demon-cleansing picture.

By Brett Gallman

Cinematic exorcisms have often been synonymous with schlock and theatricality, two pillars of exploitation filmmaking that have perpetuated the mysticism surrounding these rituals. With *Godless: The Eastfield Exorcism*, Australian director Nick Kozakis subverts this relationship, harnessing his camera to demystify the practice and speak truth to power. Rather than exploit exorcisms for another formulaic occult horror outing, Kozakis explores how the ritual itself is exploitative, often deployed against the most vulnerable victims of society.

Inspired by true events, *Godless* gathers the familiar pieces of the exorcism movie. Lara (Georgia Eyers) and Ron (Dan Ewing) are a young couple whose lives are upturned when the former becomes plagued by strange visions and begins to behave erratically. When frequent trips to a psychiatrist aren't providing the results he wants, Dan – a devout Christian – starts to seek spiritual alternatives. His search leads him to Daniel James King (Tim Pocock), an enigmatic preacher who arrives with a zealous congregation in tow, prepared to exorcize the demons laying siege to Lara's soul.

Once these pieces are in place, Kozakis upends the board with a vital question: what if exorcisms are just ritual abuse carried out by deluded fanatics? His unconventional approach is rooted at the intersection of his fascination with true crime and the supernatural. "I love researching all things supernatural and horror, and I wanted to see what existed in our backyard," he says. "And one thing that came to mind was exorcisms." Raised in a Christian environment, Kozakis has long been captivated by the ritual but was shocked to confront its cruelty. "I was taught a lot about exorcisms and have researched them in depth, but I found that there were a lot of cases where unsanctioned exorcisms were performed," he explains. "They were so horrific to read about because people were being put through rigorous, heavy brutality and dying at the hands of other people."

As such, *Godless* eschews the traditional, mystical approach to this material, and its terror is very much of this world. According to Kozakis, he "wanted to keep it grounded in reality and keep the grit to it" to capture that brutality. He and screenwriter Alexander Angliss-Wilson felt that the horror of the situation derives from Lara's helplessness. "The true horror in this is the conflict between Lara and the congregation," he says. "That's scarier because it's happening to people who have no control over their situation and no one's there to believe them."

Thanks to his own religious background, Pocock shares a similar interest in cult hysteria. "I grew up in what a lot of people would describe as a religious cult," he reveals before discussing how his familiarity with the subject influenced his performance as an evangelical exorcist. "I've been around that type of person for most of my life – not necessarily in terms of the violence, but just the utter, undying belief that he has in what he's doing." For Pocock, capturing that conviction was key to crafting a nuanced portrayal of religious fervor, something both he and Kozakis felt was important. Despite the horrific actions he commits, King isn't an unrepentant villain. "He doesn't see himself as being a bad guy or a violent guy," Pocock muses. "He sees himself as really being like a savior here on earth, and I had to play to the truth of what he's going for."

Kozakis chimes in, noting that he didn't want *Godless* to be a one-dimensional depiction of this ordeal. "The direction that we chose to take was to give everyone validation," he explains. "I wasn't going to Tim and insisting Daniel's a bad guy. He has a reason for being here; he legitimately needs to save her soul, and Tim took that on board with his performance." The director continues to praise Pocock, who immediately captured his attention with a memorable audition. "He put in a tape and it was just so chilling and haunting, more than anything else that we had seen," he says. "And it's because he played that character with such conviction and drew from his personal experiences."

DANIEL'S SOLDIERS (NATHAN OTTOBRE AND CALLUM TURNBULL) ARE GONNA KICK THE DEVIL OUT OF AN AFFLICTED INDIVIDUAL (ALEXANDER ANGLISS-WILSON, WHO WROTE THE FILM). THE SPACE HEATER IS A THOUGHTFUL GESTURE.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF XYZ FILMS

Pocock's experience with the material also proved to be a vital creative force. "It also helped us shape the way the script ended up going," Kozakis explains. "It was really unfortunate for Tim that he grew up in an environment like that, but it was a very valuable tool for us to put some authenticity behind what we were doing."

Lead actress Eyers was also drawn to the story's nuance. While the besieged Lara gives a face to exorcism victims, it's not her only purpose in *Godless*. "Reading the script, you obviously feel for Lara and everything that she goes through, but I think she portrays a lot of women in unhappy relationships," she says. "But what drew me to her is that she wasn't such a pushover. Because it isn't a typical exorcism film, you see her fight back and struggle. She was definitely three-dimensional, and I loved that part of it." For Eyers, the role felt like a microcosm of what women often experience even when demonic possession isn't involved, like gaslighting and being treated like a child. "We really leaned into the relationships between these characters," she reveals. "You see how much pain she's actually put through, regardless of the exorcism, the mental toll that it takes. She doesn't feel like she can express anything to the people around her."

When it came to playing the familiar role of a possession victim, Eyers was careful not to simply mimic past performances, and she credits Kozakis for giving her space to put her spin on the role. "Nick did a great job of speaking through the process of how Lara would feel with her different personalities coming through," she says. "It was more about making it a sign of her mental illness rather than just performing some sort of exorcism reaction." Still, the performance proved to be emotionally and physically taxing, as both Eyers and Kozakis joke numerous times about putting the actress through the wringer during a summer shoot marked by stifling heat. "It was really tiring, but it was such a great environment," she raves. "I felt a little bit crazy because it was so hot, and I definitely slept very well when we wrapped."

While *Godless* seeks justice for victims of unsanctioned exorcisms, Kozakis insists its depiction of religious hysteria reflects cultural issues plaguing the globe. Lara is surrounded by conspiracy theorists whose anti-vax rhetoric brings a chilling timeliness to the film's exploration of cult mentality. "It's about the echo chambers that we get in and how dangerous that thinking can be, and then what we can do to people," he explains. "And when you start getting legions of people to surround you with a thought process that isn't well-researched, it can lead to disaster," a notion he feels transcends the film's religious trappings. "We chose the path of Christianity, but this isn't an attack on religion," he claims. "If anything, it's an attack on extremist interpretations."

Despite this caveat, the cast and crew humorously offer that they sometimes felt a higher presence on set. "We actually felt like this film was cursed," Kozakis says with a laugh before revealing the production's various plagues: extreme heat, "ridiculous" storms with eerily-timed thunderclaps, and even locusts. "There's footage of the congregation praying, and you see all these locusts that came out of nowhere. I've never seen that before, and it was very bizarre," he says. Eyers also wasn't spared, as she found herself haunted by snakes, centipedes, and spiders throughout the shoot. "I'm not good with things like that. You'd think I would be since I grew up in regional Australia," she quips. "I was convinced I was cursed!"

What if exorcisms are just ritual abuse carried out by deluded fanatics?

GODLESS BUT NOT BLOODLESS: LARA (GEORGIA EYERS, RIGHT) IS MARKED BY… SATAN (LEFT)?

LEE CRONIN GETS HIS HANDS DIRTY WITH

EVIL DEAD RISE

THE FILMMAKER EMERGES FROM "THE HOLE IN THE GROUND" TO TACKLE ONE OF THE GENRE'S MOST BELOVED FRANCHISES.

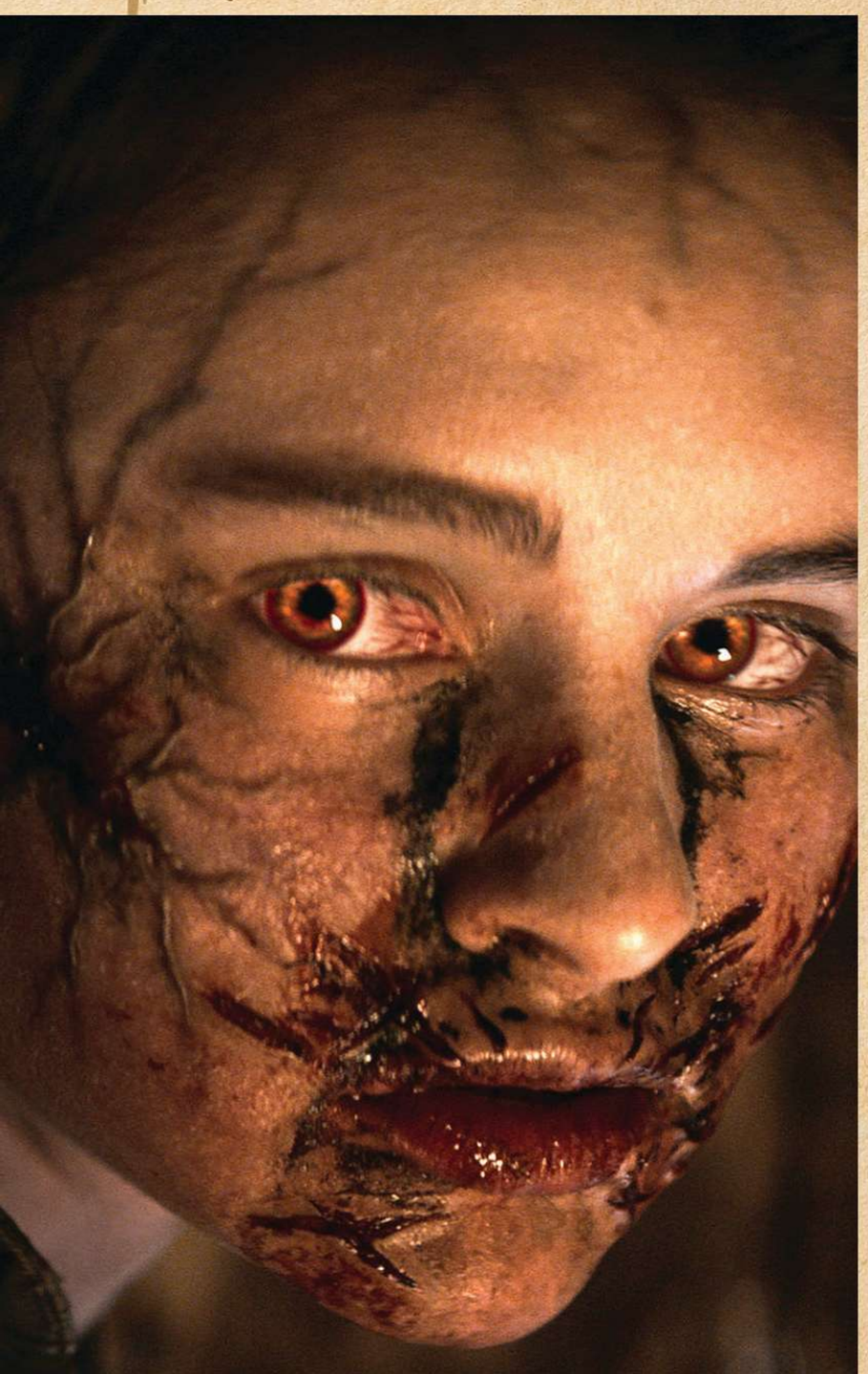
- BY MICHAEL GINGOLD -

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. PICTURES / (TOP RIGHT) PHOTO BY KIRSTY GRIFFIN

Irish filmmaker Lee Cronin estimates that "I was born just after the initial release of *The Evil Dead*, give or take a year," and his breakout debut feature *The Hole in the Ground* is a gradual slow burn, far removed from the aggressive approach of Sam Raimi's trilogy. Yet Cronin landed the plum assignment of writing and directing *Evil Dead Rise* (opening April 21 from Warner Bros./New Line), the fifth in the supernatural splatter series, which allowed him to indulge the other side of his genre enthusiasm.

In *Evil Dead Rise*, sisters Beth (Lily Sullivan) and Ellie (Alyssa Sutherland) and Ellie's teen and preteen children (Morgan Davies, Gabrielle Echols, and Nell Fisher) are terrorized in an apartment building, following the discovery of one of the three *Naturom Demonto* volumes in a subterranean chamber. As one after another of the family and their neighbors become possessed by vicious, taunting Deadites, the screen doesn't just run red, it positively explodes with it. It's clearly the work of a fan of the *Evil Dead* films — the first two of which Cronin initially discovered when his father brought home the VHS editions when he was 9.

SUTHERLAND LISTENS INTENTLY AS DIRECTOR LEE CRONIN (CENTER, WITH EP ROMEL ADAM) DETAILS THE COMING CHAOS.



POOR BRIDGET (GABRIELLE ECHOLS) – DEADITES ARE HELL ON THE SKIN.

FACING TOP: LILY SULLIVAN'S BETH REVS INTO THE ASH ROLE IN THE FIFTH FILM OF *THE EVIL DEAD* FRANCHISE.

FACING BOTTOM: WHEN ELLIE (ALYSSA SUTHERLAND) ASKS HER SISTER TO HELP OUT WITH THE KIDS, IT'S A BIGGER ASK THAN MOST.

Given the differences between *The Hole in the Ground* and the *Evil Dead* films, were you surprised when you got the gig to do *Evil Dead Rise*?

That's an interesting question, because when people ask me about my top five horror movies, they would include both *Rosemary's Baby* and *Evil Dead II*, so I'm interested in the psychological spectrum, but also that crazier aspect and the gore. When I first met with Sam Raimi, it wasn't specifically about *Evil Dead*; he had seen *The Hole in the Ground* and wanted to talk about potential projects we could collaborate on. I raised the topic of *Evil Dead*, and I think he found that a bit unexpected, but he jumped at the opportunity to talk about it more.

For me, *The Hole in the Ground* is a whisper at the back of your neck, whereas *Evil Dead Rise* is a full-frontal scream in your face. I was happy to make that change, and it was refreshing to do something more unhinged. But I do think the commonality between the two, and one of my favorite things about the *Evil Dead* world, is the psychological aspect, beyond the spectacle. The possessed really like to get under the skin of the living, and I always found that very intriguing. To me, there is actually quite a lot of emotional power in the *Evil Dead* movies, so I felt very comfortable being able to flex those muscles, but with the volume turned up to 11.

Whose concept was it to take *Evil Dead* into an urban setting for the first time?

That was something I brought up in early discussions. It wasn't based on the thought of, 'I have to change this up and move it out of the forest;' it was looking at the family unit and some metaphors that interested me. I've spent my grown-up life living in apartments, wondering who the people are who live upstairs, downstairs, left and right, inside that world. That was the starting point: the idea that we live in increasingly condensed spaces, and what happens if you're inside that space and something horrific happens, or evil knocks on your door? From there, I started to develop the characters and the relationships that could exist inside that urban, apartment-based playground I had in mind.

Tell us about coming up with your own *Naturom Demonto* for this film.

It's touched on in *Army of Darkness*, in a bawdier, more comedic fashion, that there are a trio of books, when Ash is

THIS PAGE: MOMMY'S WITH THE MAGGOTS NOW. SUTHERLAND'S ELLIE BRINGS MOTHER HORROR TO A WHOLE OTHER DIMENSION.

sent to find one and discovers three. I saw that as a license to take one of those books and make it my own, and build that back strand of the universe. It felt like an opportunity to draw a nice line to the original and perhaps also to the book in Fede Álvarez's [remake], which had a different look as well. And in approaching mine specifically, although it's an inanimate object, it has a lot of personality, and it plays a part and acts as a kind of guide to what happens during the movie. Getting to create one of those was purely putting the fan hat on, and one of the most exciting parts of making this movie. I had a job to do as a filmmaker, but I did enjoy my daily Book of the Dead meetings as we determined how it would look and how it would operate. There was a huge amount of love, care and attention put into every single page and detail; it's completely handmade from every stitch through every drawing. I'm quite happy to say it's sitting in my drawer, awaiting an appropriate cabinet to keep it in.

How did you arrive at the look of your Deadites?

I wanted to maintain a connectivity with the characters we knew before they're possessed. Although I massively appreciate the more elaborate Deadite makeups in *Evil Dead II*, for example, because of the psychological warfare I play on the family via the evil force, I felt the personalities of these people should still be recognizable and shine through. I also wanted to have a little bit of variety. When people watch the movie and look into the details, they'll see variety in the eyes, variety in the looks. Some are simple, some are more complicated. The goal was to make sure there were tendrils of humanity left inside those Deadites, so that it would be all the more terrifying and devastating when the behavior starts to change.

The actors went through so much prosthetic work and blood; how did they take all that?

Well, we all know *Evil Dead* movies touch on every aspect of gore and blood and vomit and things like that, and there were moments surrounding the expulsion of liquid from within the body that were challenging. For the cast in that case, sometimes it's the things you think will be really simple that actually are the ones that the actors find the most trying. Obviously, Alyssa as Ellie had to go through a fairly major transformation, and a lot of physicality and makeup applications, and had to grind out a lot of really long days. And then Lily Sullivan, who plays Beth, had to go from being this person who shows up seeking familial comfort into an unlikely hero who has to stand

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. PICTURES

up and fight back. Something I hope she still has collected is, when she started to notice all her bruises and bumps from the fighting and so on, I was like, "Photograph them all, 'cause that will almost be like your diary of the journey of making this movie." We were like one big family, and without that cast and their personalities and their energy leading the way... You know, I did my best to make their job easier, but ultimately, they made my job way, way easier through their attitude and skill.

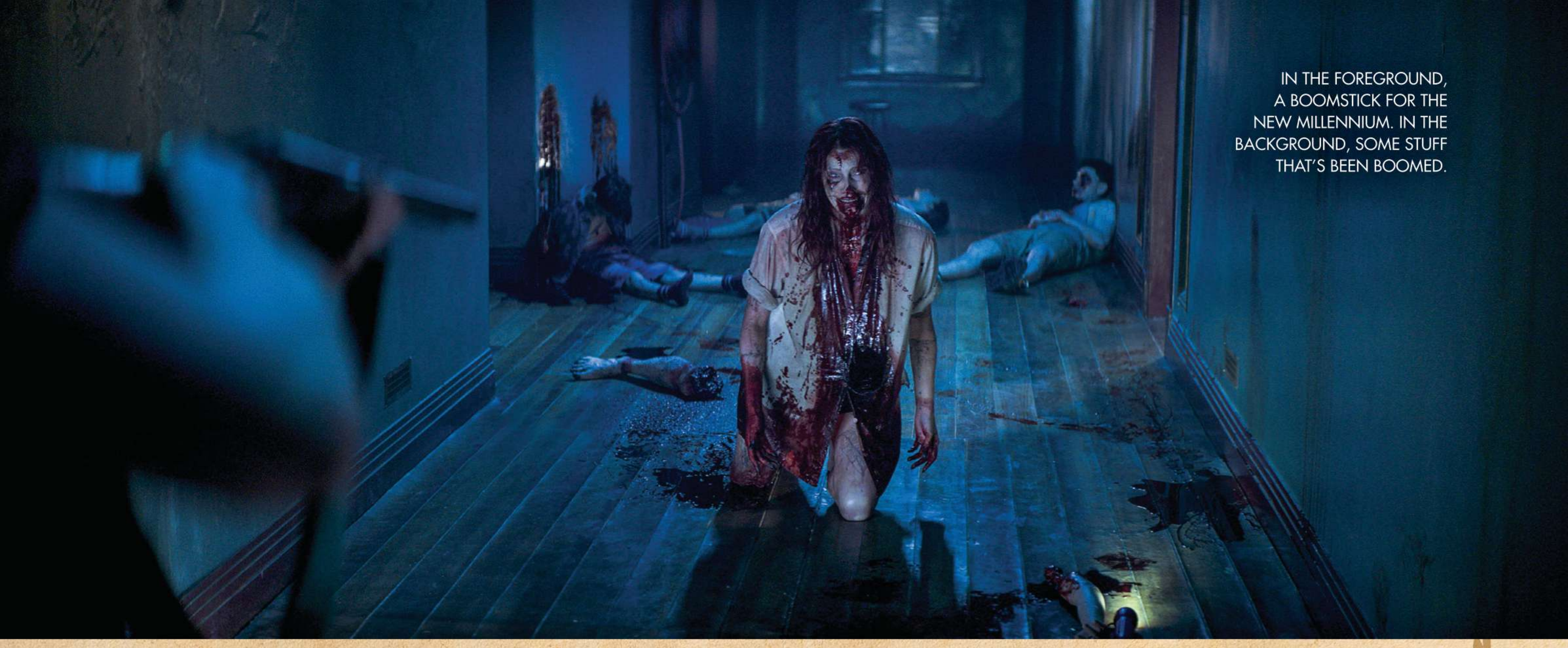
How much blood did you actually use on the film?

Blood is expensive, and I always had to keep a cautious eye on how we were going to use it, and when. We used a lot of blood on the final few days of shooting, and I think one of the last questions I asked any crew member before I headed off from the shoot — it may have been the last one — was, "What was the final tally on the blood?" It was six and a half thousand liters, and that's six and a half thousand liters of real, sticky, proper movie blood. It wasn't water with red food coloring, but the stuff that was cooked in an industrial kitchen, and had to be stored and minded and cared for and stirred and all those kinds of things. I still sometimes find things from the shoot that have bloody fingerprints on them, the clapboard or my hat or whatever; it got everywhere.

WELCOME TO ONE OF HORROR'S MOST BELOVED FRANCHISES, NELL FISHER! UH, GOOD LUCK.

"WE LIVE IN INCREASINGLY CONDENSED SPACES, AND WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU'RE INSIDE THAT SPACE AND SOMETHING HORRIFIC HAPPENS, OR EVIL KNOCKS ON YOUR DOOR?" – LEE CRONIN

WHAT'S COOKING? IF THE TRAILER'S ANYTHING TO GO OFF OF, THE ANSWER'S A REALLY GROSS OMELET. (JUST PLEASE, NOTHING THAT REQUIRES A BOX GRATER.)



IN THE FOREGROUND, A BOOMSTICK FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM. IN THE BACKGROUND, SOME STUFF THAT'S BEEN BOOMED.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. PICTURES

The movie is also assaultive in terms of its music and sound design; it may be the loudest horror film I've seen in a while...

Good, good! I take the sound process extremely seriously, and in the writing process, I discuss sound quite a lot. Not overtly in terms of saying, 'This is the sound,' but I use sound effects as part of my way of describing what's happening. I don't have the script at hand right now, but from memory, the opening line says, 'Over black, we hear a chanting chorus, like a thousand maniacs — it's in your head now.' My sound designer, Peter Albrechtsen, who is an incredible artist in his own right, really recognized my thoughts about sound in this movie, so it was a huge narrative tool. Bruce Campbell loves the sound process, too, and very kindly brought me and Peter a hard drive with all the original *Evil Dead* and *Evil Dead II* sound effects, the ones the guys recorded in analog fashion back in the day. We utilized a lot of those as textures in the film: The original fly is there, at the beginning and end of the movie, along with the original wind that Sam recorded one night on his Nagra when he heard this particular wind. So there are these layers of history throughout the whole sound design of the film.

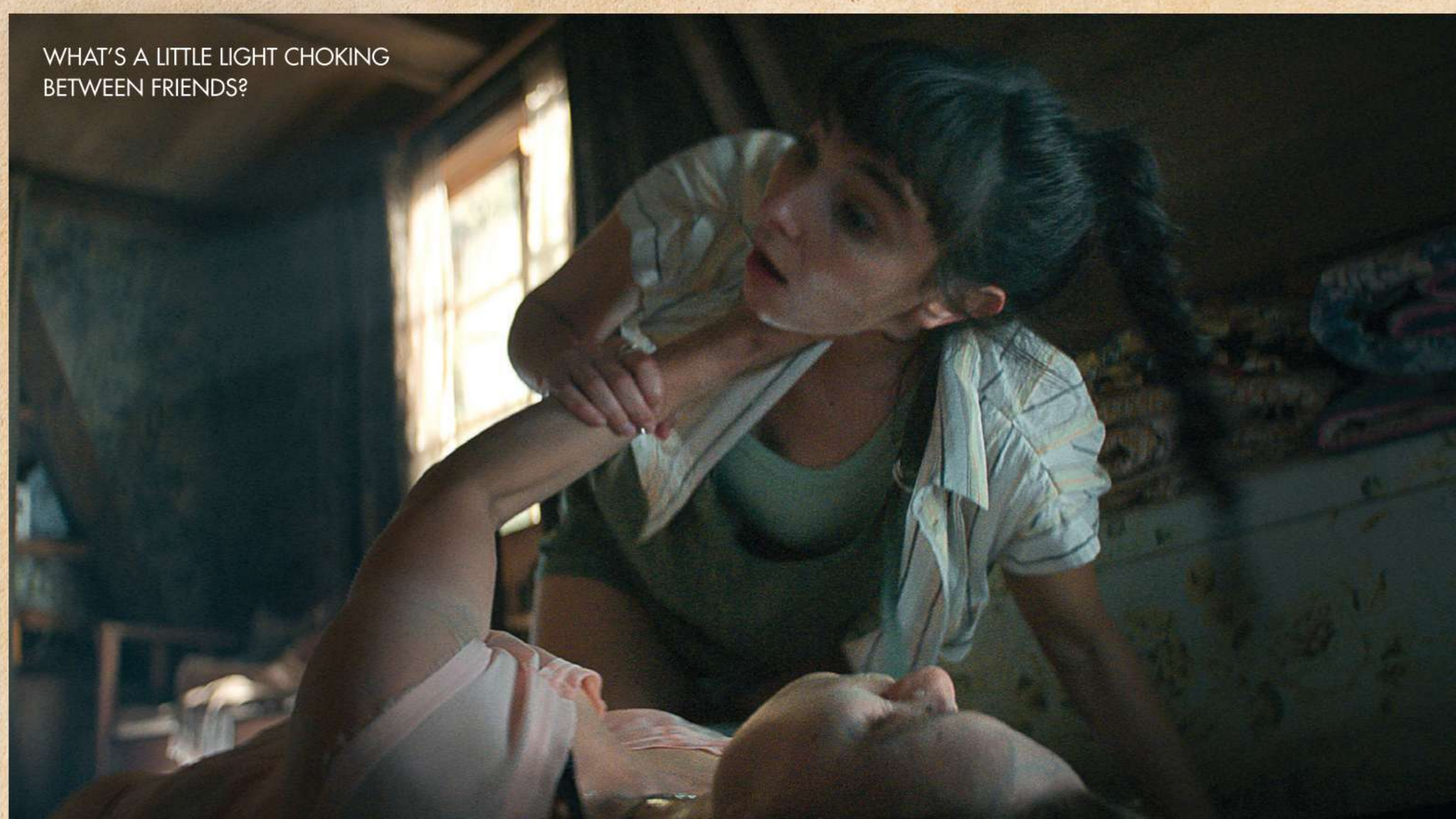
Although what we take in with our eyes during a movie is so obvious, what we absorb with our ears is just as vital, and makes up 50 percent of the experience. Especially with a horror movie, and especially one that I wanted to feel like a thrill ride. I wanted to create a ghost train on steroids, and take you on that journey and have that energy. I thought back to childhood experiences of going on dark rides and how every click and noise would be exaggerated in a way that would keep you on edge, and I always wanted quite a brash sound mix on the movie. So for the fans who are going to go out to see it on opening weekend, if they can get into a theater with Dolby, the experience will be all the better.

Talking about the fans and how they'll react, how much did fan expectations guide how you approached conceiving and making *Evil Dead Rise*?

As I spoke about a little bit before, I think my job is to take off the fan hat and be a filmmaker, a storyteller, and do what inspires me and drives me to make the movie. But because I'm also a fan, I had a chance to exploit things I loved and to show reverence, really. That was important to me, and there are some very subtle things that fans will recognize, and then there are more overt things as well. I wanted the fans — being one of them myself — to feel like they're in a comfortable space, but also experiencing something new. I believe that if you're given the opportunity to revisit a world you adore, while also suggesting that there's even more to discover, that's an exciting prospect. There are quite a lot of interesting Easter eggs in there, and I'm intrigued to see if people will pick up on all of them.

But ultimately, the spirit was the most important thing, and when I was working, the one Post-it Note I always kept near me was, 'Make it entertaining.' With horror, there are so many different temperatures: People like more gore or less gore, they like the creeps, some people like jump scares, some people don't, and this movie offers a lot of the different notes you can play inside a horror movie. But on top of all of that, the apex was scary and entertaining — just making sure that no matter what, I delivered those two things.

This conversation was edited for length and clarity.



WHAT'S A LITTLE LIGHT CHOKING BETWEEN FRIENDS?

SAM RAIMI, BRUCE CAMPBELL AND ROB TAPERT FIND NEW BLOOD IN EVIL DEAD RISE

THEM, NOW (TOP) THEM, THEN (BELOW): STAR BRUCE CAMPBELL, DIRECTOR SAM RAIMI AND EXECUTIVE PRODUCER ROB TAPERT OF *THE EVIL DEAD* (1981) RETURN TO PRODUCE THIS YEAR'S *EVIL DEAD RISE*.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GHOST HOUSE PICTURES

The three genre veterans behind the franchise are pleased to report that the kids aren't all right.

By Michael Gingold

When *Evil Dead Rise* opens in theaters April 21, it'll be six days past the 40th anniversary of the original *The Evil Dead* beginning its theatrical release back in 1983. This also represents something of a homecoming; *Evil Dead Rise* is the film series' first entry since the initial one to be released by New Line Cinema. "It's a return to New Line!" exclaims Bruce Campbell, the franchise's perennial actor and an executive producer on the latest movie. "That's always fun to say. That's where we started, back with our good buddies at New Line."

It wasn't always going to be that way, though. Parent company Warner Bros. Discovery originally announced the movie in 2021 as an HBO Max exclusive, and it wasn't until late last summer that those plans changed. "We thought we were just going to be a streamer as late as the 4th of July of last year," producer Rob Tapert recalls. "It was really the new management coming in, Michael [De Luca, who had run production at New Line in the '90s] and Pam [Abdy], that changed the course of *Evil Dead Rise* and moved it from being an HBO premiere to theatrical, and we're incredibly grateful. Certainly, Mike has a bunch of horror in his background, and he appreciated the audience experience when he saw it at a test screening."

"I was over in Europe working on post for this film, since I love the sound process," Campbell adds, "and I got to see it unfold. And by the end of it, I was really bummed, thinking, 'This is gonna be [straight to] streaming?' Our deal with New Line, with the COVID thing and theaters closing, and nobody knowing if theatrical would survive, was, 'You're streamers,' and we had to make peace with that. We kept working on the movie, and things would get better and better every week, and finally, we had another test screening after it was finished. And the ratings from that went up so much, New Line said, 'Oh! OK, we're gonna go theatrical.' So we're excited now. You know, studios can be very jaded with the movies they make, and for them to say, 'Oh wow, this deserves a theatrical!'… That's what we all feel; it's a high-quality movie that Lee made."

He's referring to Lee Cronin, the Irish filmmaker handpicked by initial trilogy director and *Rise* executive producer Sam Raimi to script and helm the new film (see page 24). Like a number of critics and festival audiences, Raimi was impressed by Cronin's 2019 debut feature *The Hole in the Ground*, about a mother dealing with her young son's bizarre behavior after an encounter with a mysterious sinkhole in the woods near their home. As finely wrought as it is, *Hole in the Ground*'s measured, slow-burn approach to folk horror doesn't seem like the most obvious audition to take on the in-your-face dynamics of the *Evil Dead* pantheon, but there was plenty there to make Raimi believe he was the right man for the job.

"It was just so well-crafted," Raimi says. "I could see how meticulously the shots were put together and how Lee built suspense, and I was very impressed by the quality of the performances he got from his actors, all done on a very tight budget. It had a real sense of the supernatural being alive, something terrible being out there, so we all looked at that and realized we were in the hands of a master filmmaker who just hadn't done a lot at that point. That and his sterling personality, his good sense of humor, and his love and understanding of the *Evil Dead* movies really made him the ideal candidate to take this one forward."

DIRECTOR LEE CRONIN OVERSEES A NEW GENERATION OF ABOMINATION IN *EVIL DEAD RISE*.

"That's our job as the guys who made the original ones, because we feel we know what the audience demands from this particular genre." - Bruce Campbell

Cronin is following in the footsteps of Fede Álvarez, who was tapped by Raimi, Campbell and Tapert to take the reins of the 2013 *Evil Dead* remake. "Fede was able to step up and deliver a really good movie that audiences wanted to see," Tapert says. "So after resting the franchise for 20 years, we were able to pair *Evil Dead* with somebody who really got what it was all about and make a great film."

After that, Raimi recounts, "We really wanted Fede to do a sequel. We had talked about Jane [Levy, the '13 film's star] either running the show in that or meeting Ash, because we wanted to make our own original continuation of *Ash vs. Evil Dead*, the TV series. When I was making the *Spider-Man* films, all I kept hearing was, 'Yeah, but when are you going to make another *Evil Dead*?' So we made Fede's movie, and even after that, I heard, 'Yeah, but when are you and Bruce going to make another *Evil Dead*?' I was like, OK, as much as they love Fede's film, they still want that other flavor we used to do, so that's when we did *Ash vs. Evil Dead*, to give them one final taste of Bruce in that role. Then after Bruce hung up the chainsaw, we said, 'Let's delve back into how we can make another *Evil Dead* movie even if Bruce isn't starring in it — a different route.'"

That road leads to an urban setting, a first for the franchise. *Evil Dead Rise* takes place in an apartment building where Ellie (Alyssa Sutherland) lives with her kids, teenage Danny (Morgan Davies) and Bridget (Gabrielle Echols) and little Kassie (Nell Fisher). Shortly after Ellie's estranged sister Beth (Lily Sullivan) arrives, one of the three *Naturom Demonto* books is discovered in a chamber beneath the building, and its evil is unleashed upon the family, forcing them into a bloody fight for survival against their neighbors and each other.

"It's nice to get out of the woods," Campbell says, "and we believe the urban environment works great: a cool old apartment building, a creepy underground bank vault… I give Sam credit for finding Lee Cronin, 'cause just like with Fede, if he had just thrown a curveball or hit a second-base double, it wouldn't have worked. But both of these guys were at the right place in their careers, they were very respectful of the franchise, and I think were pretty delighted to come on board. We caught 'em at the right time!"

When it comes to the trio's own involvement in the reboots, Campbell notes, "We're happy tour guides to these directors: 'Ahhhh, don't go around that corner, you don't wanna go there… go more around *that* corner.' Little tiny adjustments. But I believe they have enjoyed a lot of freedom, and we've allowed them to play in a pretty expandable sandbox. That's sort of our job as the guys who made the original ones, because we feel we know what the audience demands from this particular genre, so as producers we feel very much as obliged as the directors to deliver what they want. It's a pretty hard-hitting R-rated movie, and that's what they want. When the trailer came out, the response I kept seeing was, 'Wow, that's creepy as hell,

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. PICTURES / (LEFT) PHOTO BY KIRSTY GRIFFIN

BETH (LILY SULLIVAN) SHOWED UP LOOKING FOR FAMILIAL COMFORT, AND JUST FOUND A REALLY BAD TIME INSTEAD.

I'm not sure I can handle this one,' and that's exactly what we were after, because then they'll go see the movie, to find out whether they can or can't."

Indeed, even given the MPAA's 21st-century permissiveness regarding the red stuff, *Evil Dead Rise* is one of the goriest features ever to get away with an R rating; the characters are literally drenched in blood at numerous points. It's a far cry from the days when the first two *Evil Dead*s had to be released unrated. Those films went out from independent distributors, and Campbell says one of the differences with *Evil Dead Rise* is "[*Coughs*] Studio! [*Coughs*]"

"What Bruce is coughing is kind of right," Tapert adds. "We submitted *Evil Dead Rise* to the MPAA, and we didn't get any pushback at all. And that was the first time that happened on an *Evil Dead* movie."

"Even Fede's didn't have it so bad," Campbell says. "I don't think they went after that one too much."

"A little bit," Tapert continues. "We had to make a few tiny trims on the tongue being cut, frames off the end, and a couple of other things. I think the world has changed a little bit regarding ratings, and this particular one just sailed through, which was unusual for an *Evil Dead* movie."

There's one common element of past *Evil Dead* films that doesn't turn up in *Rise*, of course, and that's Campbell as Ash. A portion of the fan base believes it's not really an *Evil Dead* movie without him, but Campbell counters, "That's OK — they got a shit-ton of Ash in the TV show! They got over 15 hours of Ash, carnage and mayhem; that's how many movies strung together?

"I think that in order for this thing to survive, you can't really rely on one particular actor or character," he continues. "I like to see that as the evolution of this franchise, because what I believe people can relate to in the *Evil Dead* movies, in a way, is that it's supernatural but with normal people. There's no one in charge, and nobody in these films has any sort of special skills. Now it's a single mom and her kids and her wayward sister having to deal with this scenario, and they're all just regular people. That's the fun of it: You take normal people and put them in a really, really horrible situation, and watch them cook."

On that note, *Evil Dead Rise* was filmed in New Zealand due to financial obligations tied to the safety of shooting there during the pandemic. Strict quarantine procedures for visitors had kept the spread of COVID in check in that country, but Tapert reveals, "A couple of cases popped up with nine days of shooting left, and we were shut down for nine weeks. Some cast members were very unhappy, because they couldn't leave since they couldn't get back into the country, and it was a nightmare. But we eventually went back to work and finished it, and now everybody's happy."

And if audiences are happy with what this team has wrought, we can look forward to the evil dead rising again. "I like working with these guys, and we'll figure out a way to keep doing this as long as people buy it," Campbell says, and Raimi notes, "We listen to the audience, and we do put in possibilities to help us make a sequel, in case there is that desire for it. Even as early as *Army of Darkness*; that's why we had three books that Ash finds, because we thought, 'We're gonna put these in here, so we can make other movies based on discovering these books.' And that's exactly what we've done here."

"We believe it can continue," Campbell says, "because as Sam said, it's kind of about the books now. I mean, there are three of these bastards, and where are they going to show up next and under what circumstances? So I think the world is our oyster." 💀

THE CLOSE-UPS AREN'T THE ONLY THING THAT'S EXTREME HERE.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KEVIN WILLIAMSON

IT'S BEEN A SCREAM

FROM *SCREAM* TO *SICK*, WRITER KEVIN WILLIAMSON HAS SPENT HIS CAREER REFLECTING – AND SHAPING – THE CULTURE THROUGH GENRE.

BY JAMES VANDERBILT

(RIGHT) PHOTO COURTESY OF OUTERBANKS ENTERTAINMENT / (LEFT) PHOTO BY PHILIPPE BOSSÉ COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT PICTURES

DESPITE THIS PHOTO, *SICK*'S PARKER MASON (GIDEON ADLON) HASN'T CROSSED PATHS WITH GHOSTFACE… YET.

Over a quarter century ago, Wes Craven and Kevin Williamson's *Scream* resurrected the long-depleted slasher formula with wildly successful results, and Williamson went on to breathe new life into various other corners of the genre, with *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, *The Faculty*, and *The Vampire Diaries* all becoming cultural touchstones, as well.

In 2023, with the release of a sixth *Scream* film, it's clearer than ever that Williamson didn't just make his mark on horror – he might have changed it forever. And he's still contributing: John Hyams' pandemic-set slasher *Sick*, written by Williamson with Katelyn Crabb, was a hit at festivals and on streaming, and continues the writer's penchant for using horror to comment on the here and now. It seemed high time FANGORIA spoke with Williamson about his past and present contributions to the genre, and *Scream* (2022) and *Scream VI* co-writer James Vanderbilt eagerly volunteered for the job.

You and I once talked about your original draft of *Scream*, then called *Scary Movie*, and you told me Wes Craven or someone said, 'This is amazing: it's a first act and a third act, and any development we have to do is just putting in the second act.' And I watched your new film *Sick* and… it's a first act and a third act! And it works brilliantly.

I've always wanted to do a movie that's just one long chase scene. And *Sick* isn't it, because there is an opening, and you have 15 minutes of setup. But once it starts, it does not stop. And I thought John Hyams did a great job, beautiful camerawork. Our resources were small for that film and we didn't have a lot of time. And I thought what he did with his camera team, they really knocked it out. There are scenes in this film that I've had in my head for 15 years.

What was the spark that initially made you want to be a writer?

The piece of writing that made me want to be a writer was *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* I was a little kid and I didn't understand it, but I knew I was watching something special.

And my mom, who had always dreamed of being a writer, asked me, 'Who's the star of this movie?' And I said, 'Elizabeth Taylor.' 'No.' I said, 'Richard Burton.' 'No. The *script* is the star.' I always remembered that, and I'd think, 'I want to write something where the script is the star.'

That's the one thing that you can never fake. So many movies, anything that anyone can imagine visually on heaven and earth is being thrown at you in perfectly calibrated Dolby vision, and you're just like, 'What am I going to have for dinner?'

And that was my goal with *Scream*. I really wanted the script to shine. And I was trying to get a job, 'cause I thought, 'This movie may never get made so it better read well. I could get another job from this.'

I think *Scream* is one of the best murder mysteries ever written; the idea of there being two killers, and the way you use the tropes against each other. What is your process when it comes to building a structure like that?

I thought I had it all figured out and the big twist was, it was Billy Loomis. But there were logic issues: I tried to plant the necessary clues, 'Oh, he got one phone call in jail and he used that phone call to be Ghostface,' to let Sidney figure it out. And then I added things: 'Well, let's pretend to kill him, so then audiences scratch him off the suspect list.' And it just wasn't enough. I finally said to myself, 'There's something logically wrong with this script. There's no way one person could have done this.' That's when I came up with: 'It's both of them.'

I read so much Agatha Christie growing up that you just learn to work backward. And you take the pressure of it being a mystery off your shoulders and just make it a reveal. 'I'm going to reveal this now and then I'm going to reveal this later.' And then if it doesn't logically work, you go back and set up the clues. That's how I did it.

But it all has to tie to your main character wrestling with themes, and Sidney is wrestling with themes of trust and grief and loss.

SAM (MELISSA BARRERA) AND TARA (JENNA ORTEGA) FIND NO SAFETY IN THE CITY IN *SCREAM VI*.

PHOTOS BY PHILIPPE BOSSÉ COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT PICTURES

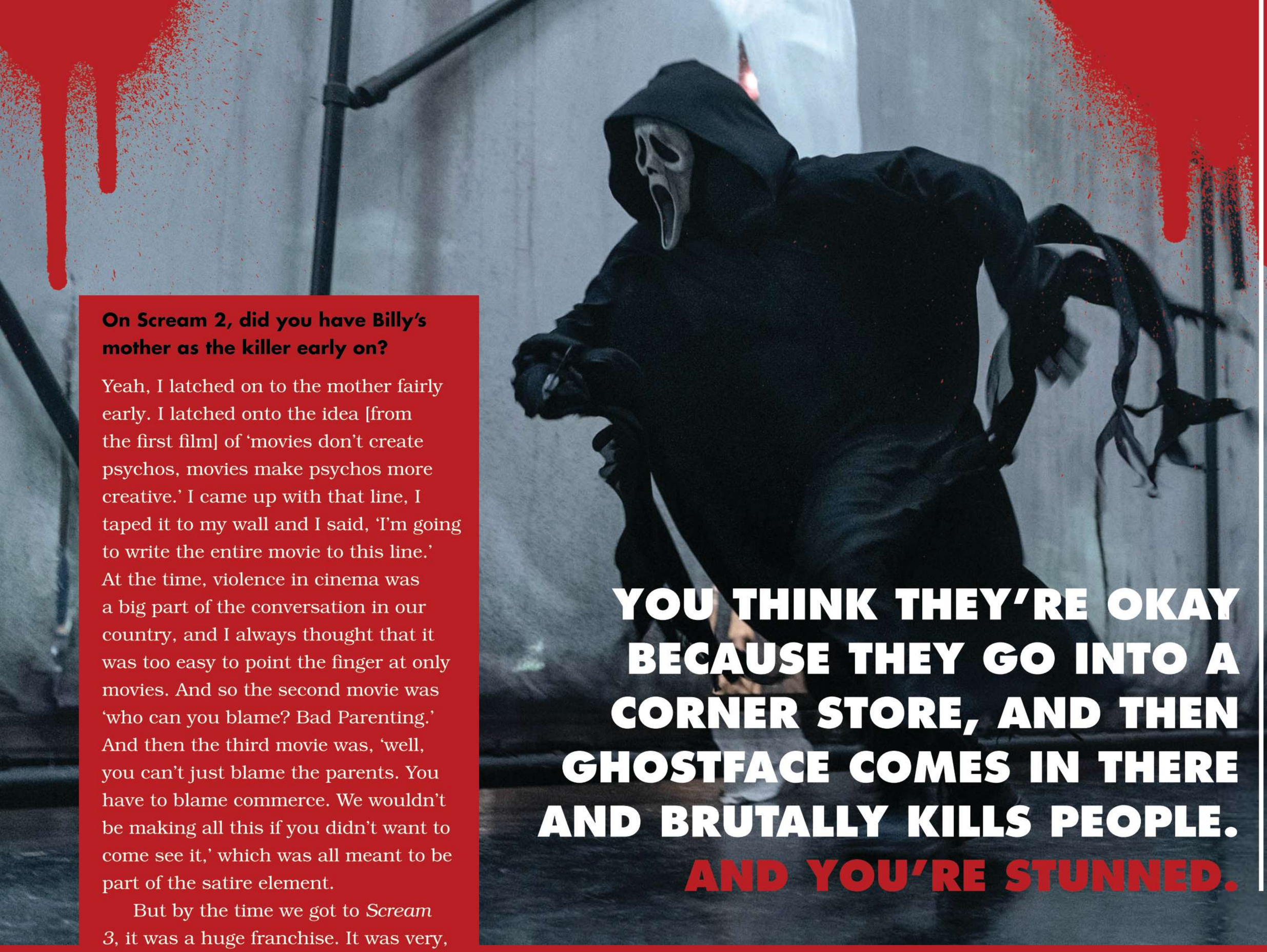
With *Scream* '22, [co-writer] Guy [Busick] and I went, 'We're never going to replace Sidney.' And so let's build someone that's the exact opposite, that is troubled, but troubled in a different way. Because Sidney felt more like the good girl who was on the precipice of sexuality. And our feeling is like Sam has blown way past that by the time we meet her.

One of my favorite things about *Scream* '22 is Sam and Tara. The relationship between the two sisters was the film's emotional connection and throughline. And I saw that sisterhood in the script, particularly when you mirrored them with Sidney and Gale.

***Scream VI* has been a sprint, with only 14 months between movies, and in the race to finish it, I've been thinking about how you wrote *Scream 2*. With the first one, you're writing a spec. It's *yours*, and you pull off this amazing magic trick. Then somebody goes, 'Okay, do it again and write it really fast and top it, but it has to be different.' You're shot out of a cannon.**

I wish I could go back and find that outline. I remember it being the opening theater scene and two more pages of plot summary. I know I didn't stick to it, but I wrote it so fast. There was no development process 'cause they needed the script yesterday. So I just wrote, wrote, and wrote and no one got in my way.

KEVIN WILLIAMSON CAMEOS IN *SCREAM 2*, INTERVIEWING COTTON WEARY (LIEV SCHREIBER).


YOU THINK THEY'RE OKAY BECAUSE THEY GO INTO A CORNER STORE, AND THEN GHOSTFACE COMES IN THERE AND BRUTALLY KILLS PEOPLE.
AND YOU'RE STUNNED.

On Scream 2, did you have Billy's mother as the killer early on?

Yeah, I latched on to the mother fairly early. I latched onto the idea [from the first film] of 'movies don't create psychos, movies make psychos more creative.' I came up with that line, I taped it to my wall and I said, 'I'm going to write the entire movie to this line.' At the time, violence in cinema was a big part of the conversation in our country, and I always thought that it was too easy to point the finger at only movies. And so the second movie was 'who can you blame? Bad Parenting.' And then the third movie was, 'well, you can't just blame the parents. You have to blame commerce. We wouldn't be making all this if you didn't want to come see it,' which was all meant to be part of the satire element.

But by the time we got to *Scream 3*, it was a huge franchise. It was very, very important to the studio, and so they had to guard it. And when you're protective of something, you start thinking, 'I can do better,' and everyone's second-guessing everybody because so much money is at stake. Suddenly I'm writing for everybody, and you get a little lost sometimes doing that. I struggled trying to incorporate everyone's ideas, and I think it showed. I just didn't know how to keep my vision and everyone else's vision and put it all together and make it sane.

I get notes where I feel like, 'I'm not saying this is a bad note, I just don't know how to do it.'

And I love the good notes. When you really latch onto the note *behind* the note, you're like, 'Okay, I know what I'm doing now.' It's a job. I love writing. Sometimes it's just really hard. Jesus Christ, it would be so great to not write. It's wonderful to talk about someone else's work.

As someone greater than me once said, 'I hate writing, but I love having written.'

I saw *Scream 4* on opening night. But at that point I'm a working screenwriter; 'I know how these things work, I'm going to figure this one out!' And I was gobsmacked when Emma Roberts starts throwing herself through a table. I just went, 'Jesus Christ, he got me again.' And it was so of the moment. When did that piece of it click?

We were living in that reality TV world of people becoming famous just to be famous. And Sidney was a celebrity victim, living this second victimization through the press and the media. And then I latched onto the niece, Emma's character. She was going to fake it all for fame.

People talk a lot about how the *Scream* movies comment on other movies, but they don't realize how much they comment on their time. Guy Busick and I landed on the idea of toxic fandom. We watched what Rian Johnson went through on *Star Wars* and thought, 'Oh, this is a different level of fan vitriol than we've previously seen.'

That's where we are now. The fan feedback tells you what you have to do. It's amazing to have devoted fans, but the internet can make things worrisome.

'You have to play these notes. And so help me, if you don't play these notes exactly...' You can't always give the audience what they want. Nobody wants Randy to die in *Scream 2*, but it is such a huge motive. Nobody wants Dewey to die in *Scream* '22, but it's such...

I was so sad! But I would've done the same thing too, just FYI. If I was writing *Scream* '22, it was the right move. And I absolutely knew it. 'Kill him.'

And what I love about *Scream VI* is you deepen the sister relationship but you also bring in the chosen family aspect, and how they're now this collective group of survivors, making their way in New York.

THEN: WILLIAMSON FILMING 1996'S *SCREAM* WITH EXECUTIVE PRODUCER MARIANNE MADDALENA AND STAR DREW BARRYMORE.

said, 'I don't know if you want to be the lead in this horror movie that's going to be released nationwide.' It could hurt your career to make a horror movie. And *Scream* is the thing that changed that. In a lot of ways, you mainstreamed horror.**

Oh, I don't know if I can take credit for that, but I'm happy to. *[laughs]* I've been very blessed in this lifetime. And I feel very lucky that *Scream* found Wes Craven. I'm very lucky that you and Radio Silence and Spyglass and Paramount all came into the picture. It's so weird, crazy and wonderful that I can have this twice in my lifetime.

There's the writing of the characters and how the mystery is going to work. And then there's 'Holy shit, we're in New York; what would be really amazing and cool to see?'

You pulled off the checklist, I think, for New York City. The corner store scene worked really well.

The idea of being around people, out in public, and not finding safety where you think you will.

You think they're okay because they go into a corner store, and then Ghostface comes in there and brutally kills people. And you're stunned. It's kind of like when we killed Drew Barrymore in the opening scene of *Scream*. All bets are off. It's unexpected. And I think it's really hard to do that when you're the sixth movie in a franchise. And this doesn't feel like it's *Scream VI*. It feels fresh; it feels new. I think everyone brought their "A" game.

I was watching a *Friday the 13th* documentary, and an actor was talking about how they got offered a role in *Jason Lives* and their agent

People can talk about luck, but at a certain point, maybe the throughline is that you are present in all of it.

You have to surround yourself with great people. That's the trick. I'm still kicking, I've still got a lot of stuff up my sleeve. I'm just going to write until someone stops paying me. And when they stop and when I can't get a job, I think that's them telling me, 'You're done.' Hasn't happened yet. 💀

NOW: SNAGGING A SET SELFIE WITH NEVE CAMPBELL AND COURTENEY COX ON LAST YEAR'S *SCREAM*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KEVIN WILLIAMSON

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project

IF YOU GOT IT

wolf

IF YOU WANT BLOOD

hunting

BY MATT DONATO

Kim Hongsun's instantly legendary crime explosion delivers the gore in buckets.

Stop me if you've heard this one before. A roster of forty-seven vile Korean criminals is being transported in secret from the Philippines to Busan; they escape their handcuffs on the cargo ship and must then survive a shadow agency's awoken mutant assassin. The best of maximalist '90s action cinema is alive and well in writer and director Kim Hongsun's *Project Wolf Hunting*, which thunders onto Hi-YAH! and Screambox services May 15th. Expect snapped limbs, dismemberment galore, and so many outrageous ideas even Nicolas Cage would be cackling with glee. Here we have another South Korean genre banger.

Hongsun methodically blends various cultural reference points, sold best by Beyond Fest programmers as "*Con Air* meets *Under Siege* meets *Resident Evil* meets *Universal Soldier*." What starts as a prisoner breakout thriller transitions into a hunt-and-kill creature feature, then the third act veers into a science fiction frenzy without any hiccups or carelessness. Noting that *Project Wolf Hunting* was released locally in theaters and via a limited American theatrical window last October, Hongsun cites the film's ambitious shifts in tone as a reason to get audience butts back in theater seats. "I had to create a [different] theatrical experience from one you could get at home. We're now in an era where genre characteristics previously found exclusively in films are ubiquitous in TV. I needed to find a way to tell a story that you needed to come to the theater to see."

Project Wolf Hunting does precisely that, yet will play just as spectacularly on streaming or digital. Hongsun stitches together subgenres like Dr. Frankenstein assembling his crowning creation, smoothing transitions from one horror calibration to the next. "I tried my best to connect the genres through the characters," states Hongsun. It's a balancing act that seems herculean given how many filmmakers fail to conquer a mix of just two subgenres – for example, horror-comedies that only get the horror or comedy right – and yet Hongsun oversees three reinventions without tanking momentum. A solid portion of our engagement with *Project Wolf Hunting* stems from characters caught in bold thematic swings because neither we, nor the scumbag scoundrels lost at sea, can believe what's happening in plain sight.

Once you watch *Project Wolf Hunting*, you'll understand the ease of comparison to *Con Air* or *Under Siege*. Convicts in restraints turn the tide against babysitting officers aboard a massive vessel where bone-crunching action takes place. Hongsun gave his story some important distinctions, however. "After I finished the initial draft of *Project Wolf Hunting*, it felt quite like *Con Air* – so I added a human modification concept."

And nostalgia for old Hollywood properties didn't fuel Hongsun's prime inspiration here. "A few years ago, I saw the news about the extradition treaty between the Philippines and Korea. The [report] said 47 criminals who fled to the Philippines were repatriated to Korea in 2017, and I thought; 'What if this wasn't the end, but the beginning of bizarre and unpredictable events?'"

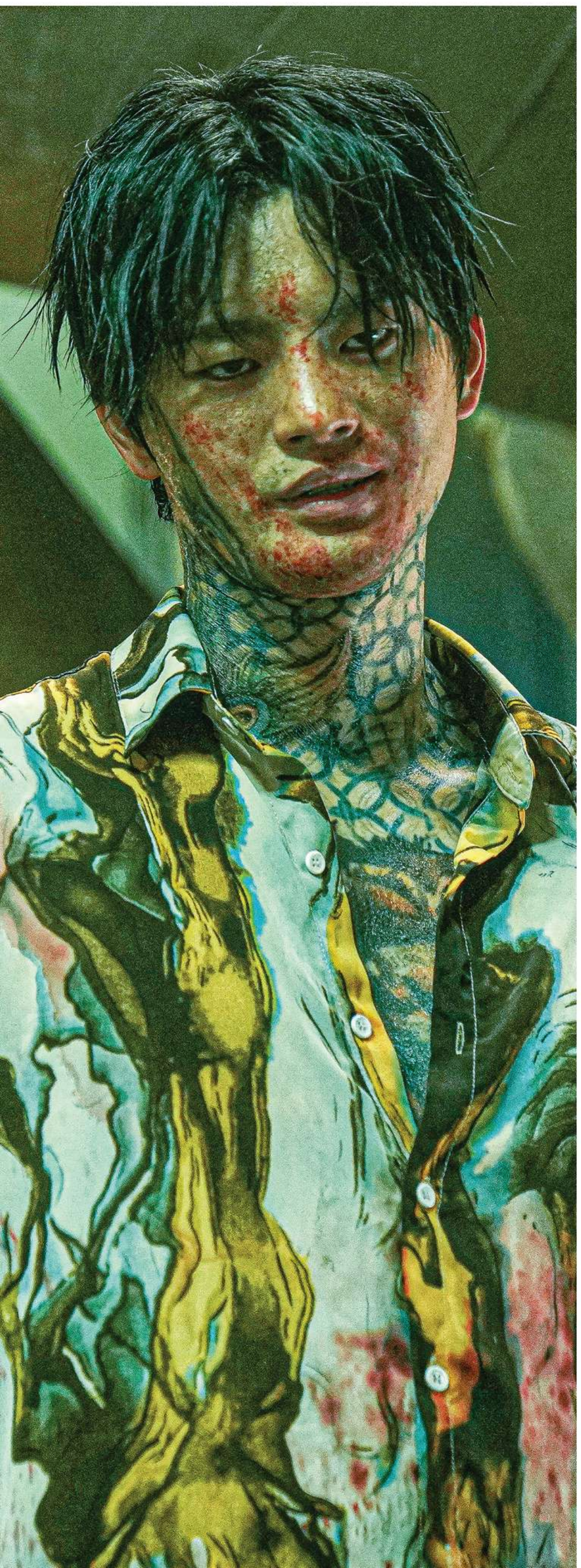
Yes, the iconically gory South Korean midnighter about spilling guts, World War II experimentation, and unstoppable killing machines is based on reality. Hongsun describes himself

ALPHA (CHOI GWI-HWA) IS ABOUT TO OMEGA A BUNCH OF DUDES; (ABOVE) JONG-DU (SEO IN-GUK) SURVEYS THE DAMAGE.

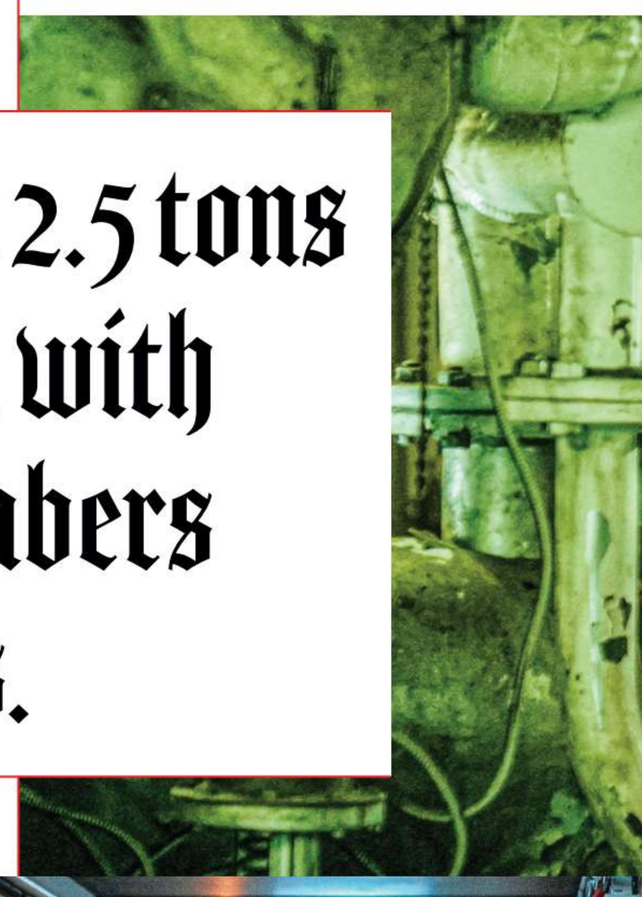
PHOTOS COURTESY OF WELL GO USA

as an "avid news lover," going as far as to chuckle, "Sometimes I feel as if TV anchors and announcers are my friends, so much so that I would say 'Hi' to them in person." The filmmaker's obsession with letting news channels run in the background during work hours led to the most unpredictable outcome thanks to a vivid and violent imagination. That and, according to Hongsun, influences by way of *Django Unchained* (blood, blood, more blood), Ridley Scott's *Alien* series (an entity running loose), and *Logan* ([redacted]).

Project Wolf Hunting unfolds like a video game with escalating fight sequences, ranging from shootouts to mini-bosses to a final big baddie showdown. Hongsun's "Alpha" – a Nemesis type of brute destroyer played by Choi Gwi-hwa – brings to mind hours logged on Xbox or Playstation.



Hongsun confirms that 2.5 tons of fake blood were used, with entire corridors or chambers drenched with red juices.



My hunch to peg Hongsun as a gamer based on his film's objective structure and extreme visual elements proved correct. "I've been a hardcore video game fan since I was a kid, and I still play games often." You can see his love woven through the script's DNA, driven by his decades of playthroughs, whether that's tactical skill sets from something like Ubisoft's *The Division*, or how Alpha targets victims one by one, straight out of Japanese RPGs like *Tactics Ogre* and the *Megami Tensei* series – some of Hongsun's recent favorite titles.

The visual calling card of *Project Wolf Hunting* is the exaggerated geysers of blood that squirt out of wounds. When someone gets whacked with a weapon or pulverized by Alpha, it's like a faucet erupts atop a Las Vegas hotel's centerpiece fountain. Hongsun confirms that 2.5 tons of fake blood were used, with entire corridors or chambers drenched with red juices no matter the scene. "There were several incidents during filming, but the toughest was the clean-up we would have to do after outtakes." We're talking blood-rain-in-*Evil-Dead* levels of crimson wetness, which could have meant disastrous downtime while wiping floors, scrubbing performers, and washing away the Saturday Morning Cartoon sensation of brutality. But Hongsun made good use of the time. "I'd use idle time for rehearsals or shoot other scenes during the clean-up… retaining individual actors' emotions and immersion in their characters between takes."

Hongsun's special effects team achieves magnificent executions, in addition to Alpha's grotesque makeup design and injury prosthetics. Every

detail is taken into consideration. "Let's start with the scene of Jong-du [Seo In-guk] biting a detective's ear off with his teeth. I thought it would be nice for Seo to feel the lifelike texture of chewing a real human ear, so I asked the makeup team for their help so that the first take would be hyper-realistic." Who says filmmakers don't care about their performers? When pressed for any personal favorite effects, Hongsun responds, "They were all horrible – but exciting."

Yes, the most cutthroat, despicable, and criminally insane inmate is played by beloved South Korean singer-songwriter Seo In-guk. In the film, he's tatted head-to-toe, a sociopath for the ages who ends lives for laughs. I asked Hongsun if the transformation was challenging for Seo, but the filmmaker insisted the role was his destiny.

"Jong-du is a villainous criminal you would never want to encounter in real life. I thought over how I might make this character more intriguing and, out of the blue, Seo In-guk curiously popped into my head. I remember the first time I met him: he walked into my office equipped with charisma and embodying Jong-du more than any Jong-du on paper

(THIS PAGE AND FACING) JONG-DU (SEO IN-GUK) IS A ONE-MAN ARMY.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WELL GO USA

could. Consequently, Seo brought Jong-du to life with his magnetic charm. He really nailed Jong-du."

The filmmaker describes Alpha as a "modified human bearing a wolf gene," which – there you go, title explained. "A creature shaped like a human, but without humanity left inside." Bringing more historical context into the fold, Hongsun wonders, "What would [Alpha] look like 100 years after human experimentation during the Japanese annexation period?" He credits the creation of Alpha to "research and contemplation on the adverse effects of human experiments and amputation of human bodies," born as a test subject under the scalpel of imperial Japanese surgeons and scientists playing God. "Alpha is neither awful nor scary to me, but he inspires fear with his every movement," only furthering the correlation between Alpha and Frankenstein's misunderstood monster. "[Alpha's] visual design was a joyful process."

That said, Frankenstein's monster doesn't sprint into an obscene massacre where heads crack open and rib cages turn to dust with a single punch.

Another impressive element about *Project Wolf Hunting* is how the body count multiplies, yet deaths never feel repetitive. It takes talent and ingenuity to churn through corpses at such a speed without the boredom of replication, which Hongsun recognizes. "Brainstorming [how] to kill people in a myriad of unusual ways… to be honest, I'm pretty creeped out thinking about it myself. I never thought there'd come a day that I would imagine how I could kill someone efficiently," he laughs. Hongsun pushed himself to ensure *Project Wolf Hunting* never turns stale, favorably comparing to Indonesian ass-kickers *The Night Comes For Us* or *The Raid* in terms of unique dispatches. "I was afraid that the limited weapons and locations would make the story feel boring with several characters dying in similar ways, so we tried our best to kill them off in as many ways as possible." Mission accomplished.

There's a feral animality to Alpha's onslaught and a primality to the violence that redecorates bunks or infirmaries with disassembled bodies. Hongsun describes the essence of killings aboard the Frontier Titan as murders in their purest form, reverting to the law of the jungle. "[The kills] transcended any moral qualms or ounce of conscience, morphing until the unthinkable becomes the simple objective: kill or be killed." Hongsun notes that fight sequences aim for "hyper-realistic action" that opts not for martial arts choreography, avoiding long-take Kung Fu intricacy in favor of the fiercest and most primitive methods of bloodlust. *Project Wolf Hunting* is an apex predator in action-horror presentations, with Hongsun's sights fixed only on the most dangerous thrills.

Project Wolf Hunting might be Hongsun's second horror feature – after 2019's *Byeonshin*, aka *Metamorphosis* – but his relationship with the genre is complicated. "Personally, I like horror films but don't enjoy them." While *Project Wolf Hunting* is absolutely a horror film (cram it, classification obsessors), Hongsun's interpretation of horror is unique. "I don't think I have the taste of a maniac, but I wanted to show more graphic killing and bloody action than [traditional] horror… horror from deeds done by one man to another outweighs that of ghosts, monsters, and supernatural phenomena." He sees Alpha as a "modified human" rather than slasher brand superbeast, wary of the term "monster" in its genre definition.

Any experience as rewarding as *Project Wolf Hunting* leaves its audience wanting more, especially since Hongsun ends on a juicy cliffhanger that I'd rather you, dear readers, experience for yourselves. Whatever I've divulged here only scratches the grander story's surface – there's still oodles of *Project Wolf Hunting* left unspoken. Although to drum up a little added excitement, Hongsun teases that in addition to a direct sci-fi action horror sequel where we "might see characters who died in *Project Wolf Hunting* again," he's currently plotting another expansion. "I'm working on a prequel about the lives of the detectives and criminals in Korea before they were caught in the Philippines, before the events of *Project Wolf Hunting*, [probably as] an action TV series." May this only be the beginning of Kim Hongsun's full-throttle, hyper-savage, and hopefully long-running *Project Wolf Hunting* universe.

Dead for the Count

The horror comedy *Renfield* finds Dracula's frustrated familiar no longer digging his gig.

By Phil Nobile Jr.

On the set of Chris McKay's *Renfield*, Dracula (Nicolas Cage) is paying a surprise visit to his errant thrall (Nicholas Hoult) inside the latter's new apartment, a cheery space decked out with motivational posters and self-improvement literature. The beleaguered Robert Montague Renfield, it seems, is trying to turn a corner after over a century of sanguinary servitude, and his ex-boss is having none of it.

Slurping blood from a martini glass that's garnished with an eyeball, Dracula mercilessly and hilariously drags his rebellious servant's attempt at a makeover before threatening to reduce him to ash and exiting the set. It's a classic Cage performance – physical, heightened, hilarious and scary all at once.

I watch Cage do the scene fifteen times before I realize the camera isn't even on him. Then the camera crew resets in his direction, and he does another dozen.

The actor later chuckles at the observation. "Listen, Chris is a very thorough filmmaker and he's very detail-oriented, and that's part of the reason why he's as good as he is. We

would do many, many takes because he's looking for something." Director McKay says the options present another problem. "Every take that Cage did is really honest, really interesting, and so fucking watchable. That's the hardest thing about cutting the movie."

Hoult also sees the value: "After we've done a few, we try to figure out something new to put into the mix. As an example, we'd been talking in between takes, and I'd mentioned to Nic that I was trying to do the Dwight Frye laugh (from 1931's *Dracula*) a little bit in some scenes. Next take, he suddenly threw that laugh back at me and started mocking me with it. That's the fun part, when unplanned things happen."

Hoult's not wrong, as the scene we observe goes through loads of variations, crossing a spectrum of intensity and absurdity, few of which will make it into the final film. (Cage as Dracula's puppeteering of a loose eyeball, talking to it before slurping it up, lives now only in my memory – or maybe a deleted scene on the eventual Blu.)

In *Renfield* (written by *Rick and Morty*'s Ryan Ridley and based on an idea by producer Robert Kirkman), we find Dracula and his familiar retreating to New Orleans after a nasty battle with some vampire hunters. With the Count severely injured, the pair post up in the basement of an abandoned hospital, where Dracula slowly regenerates by feeding on the blood of victims procured by the conflicted Renfield.

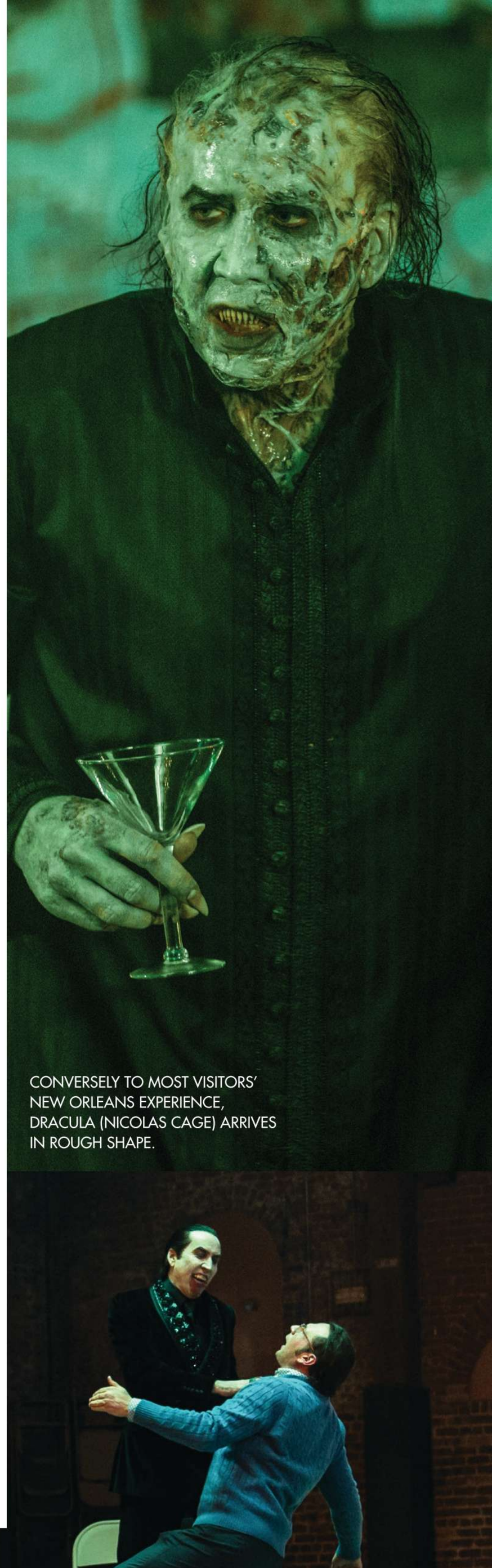
Things take a turn when Renfield – his superpowered, Dracula-infused blood activated by eating live bugs – violently thwarts an attempt on the life of Officer Rebecca Quincy (Awkwafina) by Teddy Lobo (Ben Schwartz), a petty gangster eager to prove his worth to his mobster mom (Shohreh Aghdashloo). Many goons are dispatched, some with noticeably fewer limbs than they started with. Quincy is wowed by Renfield's heroics (and lethal skills); Renfield is moved by Quincy's fearlessness in the face of evil. "When he meets Rebecca and sees her standing up to this mob family and this corrupt system in New Orleans, he's inspired to change himself," Hoult shares. "Renfield is someone who has some stuff to sort out," Awkwafina states diplomatically, "and I think Rebecca does, as well. In that way, they complement each other."

The melee causes the Lobo clan to mount a citywide hunt for Renfield, which brings the ambitious crime family into a collision course with Dracula's newfound plan for world domination, all while Renfield tries to attend a group meeting or two and practice some long-delayed self-care.

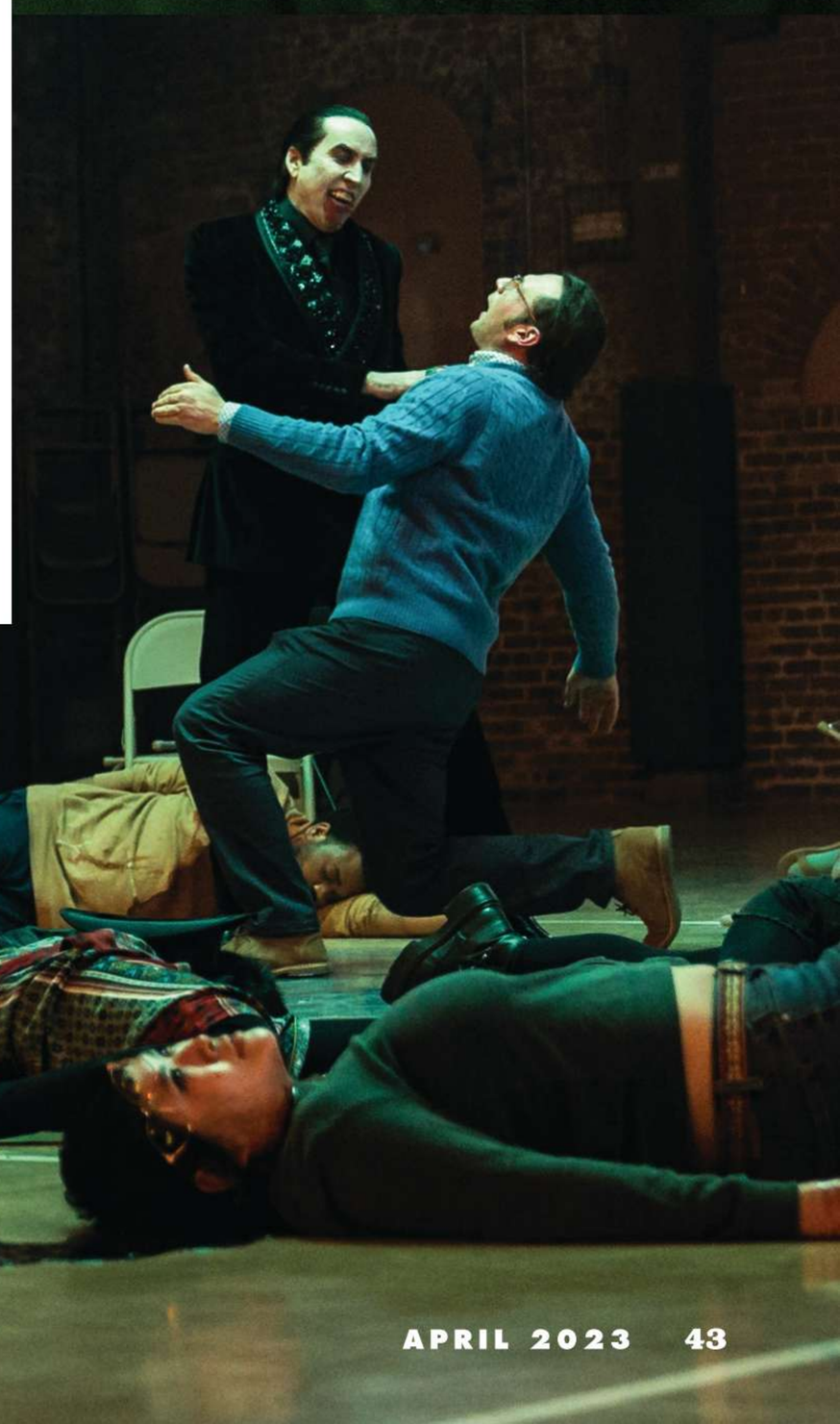
Renfield is, of course, a movie character as old as Dracula himself, and that shared history makes for a fun launching pad. "Renfield is in a Co-Dependent Anonymous meeting," McKay explains. "A woman talks about her abusive boyfriend. And Renfield starts telling the audience through narration, 'I know exactly how she feels. I've been in a bad relationship myself.' And then we go back into their history. We took Tod Browning's *Dracula* from 1931 and put Cage and Hoult into that movie."

McKay (*Robot Chicken*, *The Tomorrow War*) wanted to go even further. "Much like in *Lego Batman*, where I posited that our Batman is *every* version of Batman, I wanted to put Cage in the Frank Langella movie and the Christopher Lee movies and everything else. If I'd had the money and time, there would've been a snippet of him in every decade there was a Dracula movie."

McKay and Cage will have to settle for the prestige of making an *actual* Dracula story for Universal. I remind Cage he's only the seventh actor in a century to have played Dracula for the studio; more men have walked on the moon. "I certainly felt the sense of legacy. I mean, my gosh, I'm proud to be a member of that club." Beyond the studio pedigree, Cage cites as favorites Max Schreck, Frank Langella and Gary Oldman, though, "I would say that Christopher Lee was the one that I



CONVERSELY TO MOST VISITORS' NEW ORLEANS EXPERIENCE, DRACULA (NICOLAS CAGE) ARRIVES IN ROUGH SHAPE.



DRACULA HELPS HIMSELF TO A SELF-HELP MEETING, SAVING MARK (BRANDON SCOTT JONES) FOR LAST.

PHOTOS BY MICHELE K. SHORT COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL PICTURES

favored the most. But I wanted to try a fresh take on it and give it some pop, something that people could get excited by."

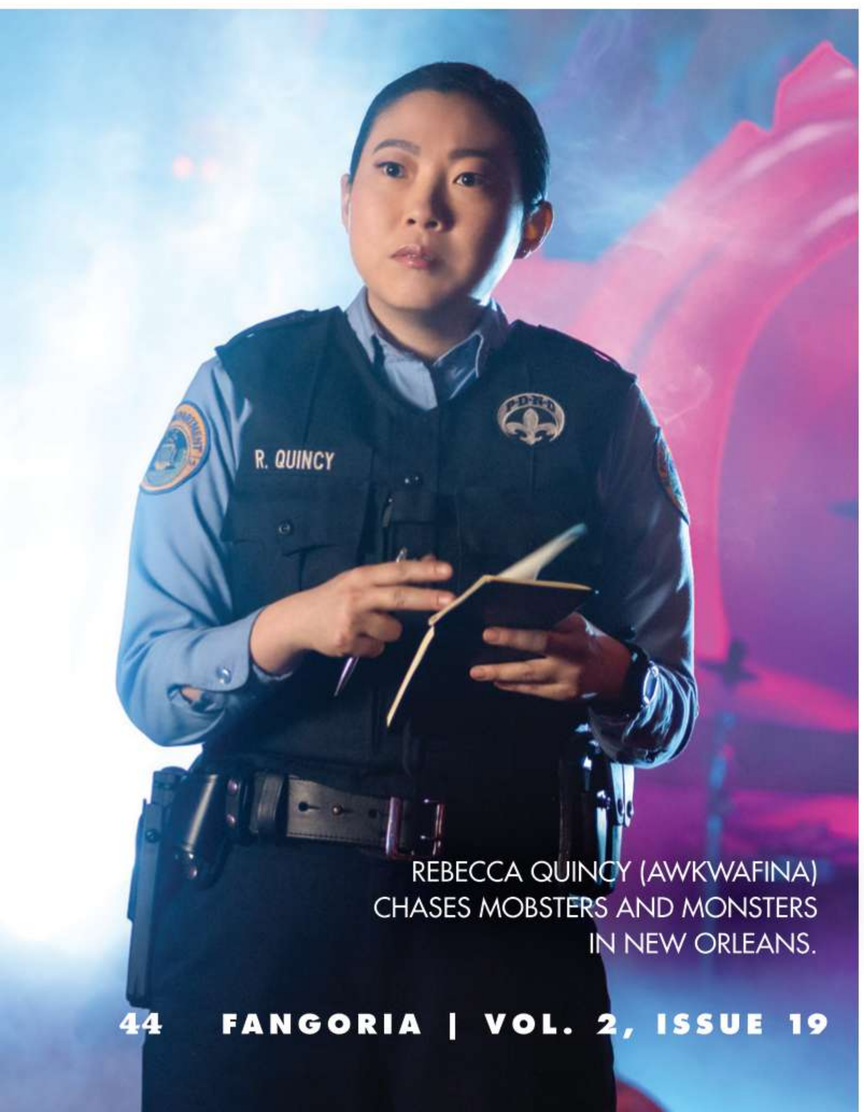
So how does one bring something new to one of the most-filmed characters in cinema? As the actor notes, "The first thing I do is apply myself to what I'm trying to understand is the psyche of the character, funneled through my own filter. So automatically it's going to be inherently different than all the other Draculas."

Cage then turned to some very mortal qualities for inspiration. "Dracula has bloodlust; that's a form of addiction. You try to find the parallels that you can substitute for that. I'm not going to go off drinking blood, but is that like alcoholism? What is that need that makes people do things they ultimately feel bad about? That's the more authentic element to the character."

On top of that foundation, Cage's Count is colored by two influences who, it's safe to say, have never inspired a Dracula performance before.

"Christopher Lee reminded me so much of my father. My dad was someone who wanted to speak with distinction. He didn't have a full-on British accent, but he did have a mid-Atlantic accent because he was a professor of comparative literature and he wanted his students to know proper English. Dracula's an articulate, elegant and eloquent character, and my dad had all those elements."

Cage then drops the second, more surprising inspiration. "For some reason, Mrs. Robinson, Anne Bancroft's wonderful performance in



REBECCA QUINCY (AWKWAFINA) CHASES MOBSTERS AND MONSTERS IN NEW ORLEANS.

RENFIELD PAINTS HIS APARTMENT COURTYARD RED; TEDDY LOBO (BEN SCHWARTZ, BELOW) SETTLES FOR LIGHTING SOLUTIONS.

> **"Nick Hoult is somebody who doesn't mind doing weird things, eating bugs, going deep into a weird character. He's as charming as Hugh Grant, and he's also completely comfortable being a guy who's gobbling up bugs."**
>
> – Chris McKay

The Graduate, popped into my head; the way she was abusing Dustin Hoffman's character, and the fact that she was an alcoholic. And the way she spoke had a kind of mid-Atlantic sound. All that, to me, worked, because this take on Dracula is really about his relationship with Renfield, a toxic relationship. And it's this master/servant crap that so many people deal with, whether it's at work or an unfortunate romantic relationship or whatever it may be."

Hoult enjoys working with Cage, with the added bonus of it being a reunion for the two. "I played Nic's son in a film called *The Weather Man* when I was 14. And we hadn't really seen each other since 2005, so this was great. I'm such a fan of all his work over the years, but this is a role where he's really having fun. It's pure, brilliant Cage."

McKay, too, couldn't be happier with Cage's interpretation. "Cage can be funny, charming, intimidating. But he's also got incredible vulnerabilities. So when Renfield rejects him, you really feel that he's hurt. It's just great to be able to get to those levels in the middle of a comedy where people get their arms pulled off."

Costume designer Lisa Lovaas (*Black Widow*) is particularly excited about working with Cage after their paths crossed previously on an ill-fated project. "I was lucky enough to work as the costume supervisor for a year on Tim Burton's [ultimately unmade] *Superman Lives*," she reveals. "I knew from my experience on that project Nic was totally game. I could present him with an elaborate Dracula, and he

would be 100% on board. He walked out of the fitting saying, 'This is it. We've done it.'"

The wardrobe trailer is a shrine to detail, from Dracula's monogrammed Dolce & Gabbana shoes to jeweled rings and medallions embedded with imagery the camera might never pick up. (Pause the film in 4K later this year and you *might* notice that Dracula's necklace is adorned with an image of Cage in full Vlad the Impaler drag.) Lovaas beams about recreating Lugosi's look (pearl buttons off Etsy), educates me on the various fabrics used in Dracula's capes (horsehair!), and shares other costuming details (Dracula shares a shirtmaker with Frank Sinatra, I'm told). A clothing rack holds a gorgeous maroon leather cloak, a smoking jacket, and what is

unmistakably Bela Lugosi's costume from 1931's *Dracula*. (I'm invited to try the cape on; I opt for Teddy Lobo's burlap wolf mask instead.)

One door over, the makeup trailer is tasked with a massive workload: limbs are pulled from sockets and used as bludgeons; heads are punched off; a priest straight-up explodes. And McKay wants as much of it as possible in-camera: "I started in stop motion, where you have to build, find, or make. Everything's practical. I've loved that kind of tactile thing since I was a kid." But as the gore lives in a kind of heightened reality, McKay notes, "I wanted the blood to be a certain color of red, more like the Tom Savini *Dawn of the Dead* blood."

As a 3D printer quietly churns out fangs, special makeup effects designer Christien Tinsley shares just how crucial color is to the film's FX.

"Is Dracula just pale, or does he have an undertone of color? Is that color more sallow and corpse-like, or is it more blue and cool tones?" Tinsley reveals that his Dracula colorway pulls from a historical element. "Hundreds of years ago, hospitals and morgues would bring in artisans to recreate the corpse in wax as it was being dissected. And they would do this in these beautiful colors, yellows and blues, copying what they were seeing, but giving them these beautiful color palettes. So that's our base, and then we evolved from there."

Beyond inspiration and aesthetics, Tinsley says, color is a secret weapon in audience empathy.

"We feel more pain for somebody when we see things like red blood, so there were certain aspects that I wanted to keep 'human' for the audience. The fingernails have a blue glaze over everything, and more yellows

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DRACULA (BELOW) SLOWLY REGAINS HIS STRENGTH IN NAWLINS WITH A STRICT LOCALS DIET.

are brought into it, but there was some red flowing underneath. With his eyes, there are a lot of purples and soft tones in there. You have to be able to relate to the character, and when you're just seeing blues and greens and things like that, you disconnect."

Though Hoult's visage isn't as showy as Cage's in the film, it was arguably a tougher makeup challenge for Tinsley. "He's not seeing much daylight, not really taking care of himself. However, 100 years ago he was a respectable lawyer. He kept shaved, he had a family. So we scrapped the idea of making him look unkempt; he has traditions. But now his skin is the same cool tones as Dracula; they're family. And we see a transition in his appearance as he becomes stronger and healthier, emotionally and mentally."

Indeed, Renfield's journey from repulsive, bug-eating madman to sweet-natured protagonist to lethally superpowered hero of the people is a very tricky needle to thread and is, despite all the Cage-as-Dracula press, the arc of the film, something Cage himself is quick to point out. "This is not Dracula's story. I wasn't necessarily preoccupied with the pathos of the character because it wasn't really the story to dig that deep with Dracula. This is Nick Hoult's movie."

McKay agrees. "Nick Hoult is somebody who doesn't mind doing weird things, eating bugs, going deep into a weird character. He's as charming as Hugh Grant, and he's also completely comfortable being a guy who's gobbling up bugs."

Hoult's interpretation of Renfield might be under less scrutiny than Cage's Dracula, but his research was no less thoughtful. "I watched the previous Dracula movies, and went back and read through the book, as well. I love those performances so much, and you do gain a lot from reading the book," he says. But Hoult indicates his take on the Count's familiar is anything but.

"The version of Renfield that we are seeing here is ninety years after the original. The madness has been beaten out of him. He's been under the thumb of this powerful man, taking care of him and clearing his bedpans or whatever, for so long."

Hoult's co-star Awkwafina overhears that last part: "You clear his *bedpans*?"

Hoult seems unprepared for this line of questioning. "I don't know. I just said that, but that's never mentioned."

"Okay."

"But I imagine, because he gets severely injured and I have to really care for him, I probably did wipe his bed sores, or clear his bedpans, I don't know."

"Right. Sure, sure, sure, sure, sure."

"Deleted scenes, maybe."

DWIGHT FRYE and the Curse of RENFIELD

By Greg Mank

HOW THE CHARACTER ACTOR DOOMED HIS OWN CAREER BY BEING TOO PERFECT IN A ROLE.

In Universal's 1931 Dracula, Bela Lugosi, as the Count, won a bizarre, legendary stardom and became an unorthodox Hollywood sex symbol.

Dwight Frye, as Renfield, achieved the debasing status of a Hollywood freak.

It's a mystery. Yes, Lugosi had the demonic glamour, the flourishes of gothic romance. Frye, however, conveyed the film's passion, its vampiric ravaging of a man's soul. As Dracula's slave, Frye was chillingly vibrant as the fly-and-spider gobbling madman, acting with wild eyes, bared teeth, a rock star intensity decades before its time... and a lunatic giggle that's one of the most spine-chilling sounds in the history of horror movies.

Renfield should have been a *tour de force* triumph for Dwight Frye. Instead, following up as hunchbacked Fritz in *Frankenstein*, he never recovered professionally. Fans likely presumed that he resided in a cage, emerging for juicy roles in such melodramas as *The Vampire Bat* and *Bride of Frankenstein*, and then going back behind bars between films. Fated to die far too young, Frye would never emerge from Renfield's accursed shadow.

In a way, it was destiny's sadistic tribute to a portrayal revered today as a classic.

STORYTIME: BELA LUGOSI, DAVID MANNERS, DWIGHT FRYE AND EDWARD VAN SLOAN SURROUND HELEN CHANDLER IN A STAGED PUBLICITY SHOT.

Between scenes, Lugosi dramatically posed at a full-length mirror proclaiming, "I AM Dracula!" Frye, always the "Method" actor, lurked in the soundstage shadows, eyes ablaze, living the role of Renfield.

He was born Dwight Iliff Fry February 22, 1899 in Salina, Kansas. His father was a farmer, his mother a devoted Christian Scientist, and both considered it a sin to appear on the stage.

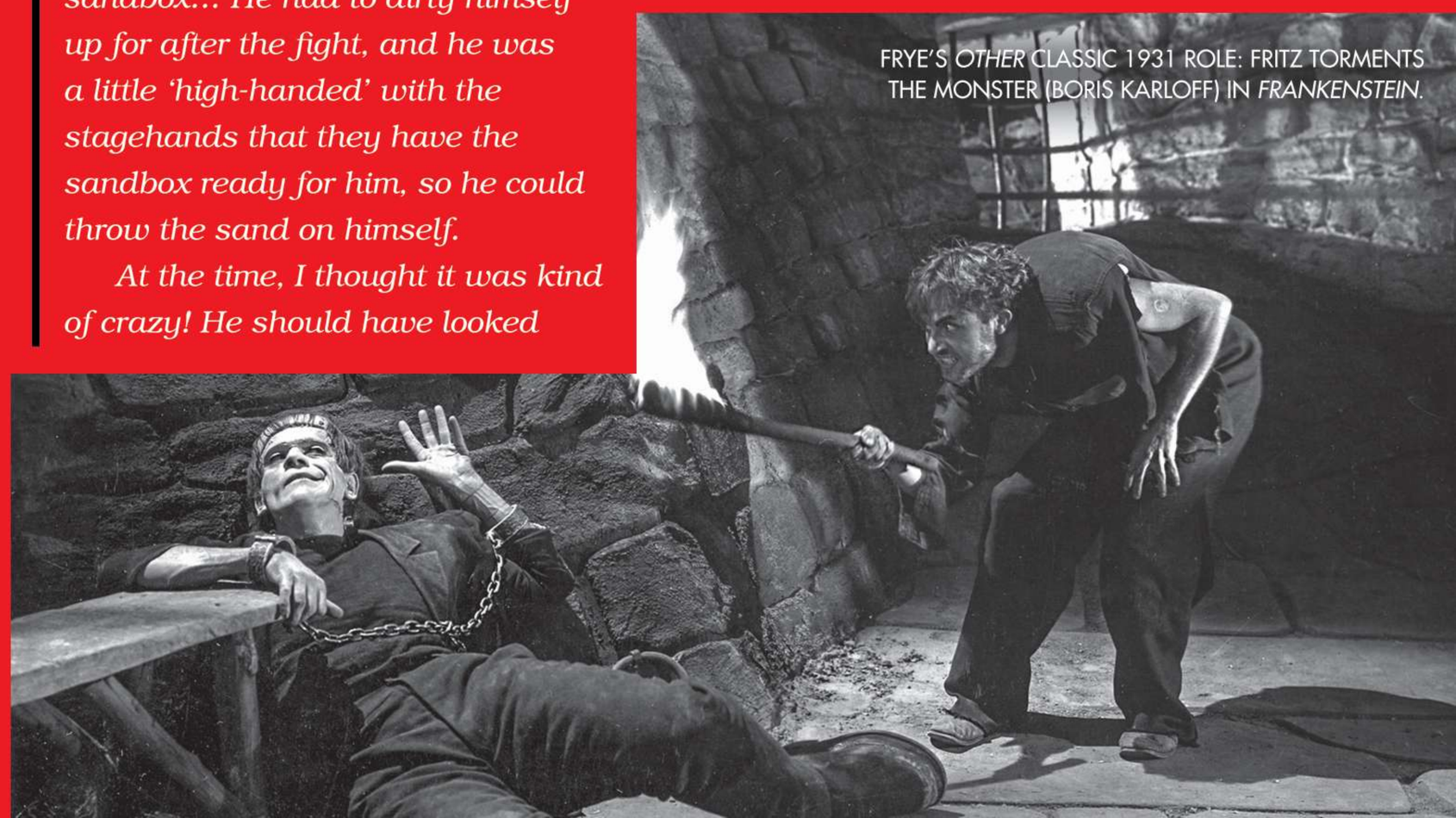
Nevertheless, Dwight developed great talent as both a concert pianist and an actor, and in 1922, at the age of only 23, made his New York theatre debut in Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Thereafter, he became a red-hot Roaring '20s Broadway actor, whose remarkable versatility ranged from singing "Bongo on the Congo" in the 1924 musical *Sitting Pretty*, to portraying the piano-playing white-slaver in 1925's *Puppets*. In the latter, his vivid villainy blew away the play's romantic leads, future movie stars Fredric March and Miriam Hopkins.

Frye was a passionate actor. An example of his obsessive approach came in *A Man's Man*, which opened on Broadway on October 13, 1925. He played Melville Tuttle, a basic "nobody." When Melville learns his wife, Edie, who fancies she resembles Mary Pickford, has cheated on him, he wildly runs off to avenge himself on her lover – and returns beaten to a pulp.

Well... as the late Josephine Hutchinson, who portrayed "Edie" (and who later played Elsa von Frankenstein in 1939's *Son of Frankenstein*) remembered 70 years later:

> *Backstage, Dwight kept a sandbox... He had to dirty himself up for after the fight, and he was a little 'high-handed' with the stagehands that they have the sandbox ready for him, so he could throw the sand on himself.*
>
> *At the time, I thought it was kind of crazy! He should have looked awful; however, most any other actor would have had two suits, wouldn't he? One that was already 'dirtied up,' and one that wasn't? Not Dwight.*
>
> *Now, after all these years, I realize: Dwight was the original "Method" actor.*

A Man's Man was a solid hit, and the *New York Times* wrote, "Mr. Frye... is required for nearly two acts to play in a hysteria of self-pity... he makes his character pitifully and pathetically real."



FRYE'S *OTHER* CLASSIC 1931 ROLE: FRITZ TORMENTS THE MONSTER (BORIS KARLOFF) IN *FRANKENSTEIN*.

Hysteria… pathetically real… they could apply to a character who loomed in Frye's future.

A number of Broadway successes followed for Frye, such as the comic lead in 1926's *The Devil in the Cheese*, that starred Fredric March and featured Bela Lugosi as a Greek mountain bandit; and as a demon named "Alfons the Spider" in David Belasco's 1928 epic *Mima*, starring Lenore Ulric as a she-creature temptress slinking from a foundry in Hell. Frye's "Alfons" was Mima's pimp, and she had a vivid line to him:

"Every time you kiss my hand, you bite me."

Meanwhile, on August 1, 1928, Frye married actress Laura Mae Bullivant. He thereafter described himself as "insanely happy" – in retrospect, a possibly poor choice of words.

Come the Sound era, Frye and Laura moved to Hollywood. There, Frye scored in two stage hits: as the weakling killer in *Rope's End*, and as Melville in a revival of *A Man's Man*. His hysteria threated to typecast him, and he responded rather hotly in a *Los Angeles Times*' story, titled "Frye Will Not Be Typed:"

> *I am a character man. There seems to be an impression I do one type of thing. I don't and I haven't. One of my first successes was in comedy… I have no interest in anything but character work, and I have made it a point to vary my roles as much as possible.*

Frye made his Hollywood film debut in Warner Bros.' 1930 *The Doorway to Hell*, as a gangster carrying a tommy gun in a violin case. Soon, however, Universal City beckoned. Tod Browning, or perhaps a Universal representative, had seen Frye in his Los Angeles revival of *A Man's Man* and teasingly dangled, like a spider from a web, a film role that seemed a plum:

Renfield of *Dracula*.

September 29, 1930: *Dracula* began shooting. The first two days focused on the exterior and interior of the inn of Borgo Pass, and Renfield's arrival-by-coach as it rolled down a steep backlot hill marked by a tall cross. The towering mountains of Universal in the San Fernando Valley gave credence to the film's opening line, read by coach passenger Carla Laemmle, niece of Universal's founder, Carl Laemmle:

"…Among the rugged peaks that frown down upon the Borgo Pass, are found crumbling castles of a bygone age…"

At Castle Dracula, as "the children of the night" howl, the rather foppish Renfield meets Lugosi's Count. "The blood is the life, Mr. Renfield," says Dracula, and soon a drugged Renfield collapses, about to be attacked by Dracula's trio of brides before the Count claims him for himself.

By the time the transport ship *The Vesta* sails into the harbor in England, Frye's Renfield is a wide-eyed maniac, sounding his classic laugh that's almost musical… and "what music he makes" as he warbles this hymn of the damned.

Between scenes, Lugosi dramatically posed at a full-length mirror proclaiming, "I AM Dracula!" Frye, always the "Method" actor, lurked in the soundstage shadows, eyes ablaze, living the role of Renfield. Helen Chandler, the languorous heroine, giggled at Lugosi and Frye from the sidelines, although her laughter might have been a defense – she was already a severe alcoholic, fighting nightly her own "vampire."

Tod Browning directed, barely communicating with the actors, but casting a certain hypnosis that went back to his sideshow nights as "a living corpse" and through his Silents with Lon Chaney, Sr.

Meanwhile, Frye took satanic possession of the role… or did the role take satanic possession of him? Frye's Renfield became increasingly demented, unholy… zoophagous. One of *Dracula*'s great moments is Frye's fervent soliloquy:

> *A red mist spread over the lawn, coming on like a flame of fire – and then he parted it and I could see that there were thousands of rats, with their eyes blazing red like his, only smaller! He held up his hand and they all stopped; and I thought he seemed to be saying, "Rats – rats – rats – thousands, millions of them. All red blood! All these will I give you, if you will obey me…!"*

Frye goes berserk in his final moments on the great winding staircase of Carfax Abbey, begging Dracula not to kill him – "I can't die with all those lives on my conscience! All that blood on my hands!" The Count breaks his neck, and Renfield's corpse tumbles down the staircase.

While *Dracula* was in retakes, Frye became a father. On December 26, 1930, he and Laura became the proud parents of a healthy baby boy, Dwight David Frye.

RENFIELD CONSIDERS UPGRADING HIS MEAL PLAN, WHICH IS BAD NEWS FOR THIS MAID (MOON CARROLL).

February 12, 1931: *Dracula* opened at the Roxy Theatre in New York City. *Billboard* hailed Lugosi as "brilliant," and Helen Chandler and Frye as "outstanding." Yet Frye, perhaps, had been too convincing as the rabid Renfield. His terrific performance should have made him a leading Hollywood character player. It didn't happen.

Frye followed at Universal with *Frankenstein*, indelibly directed by James Whale, in which he played Fritz, the sadistic hunchbacked dwarf who assists Colin Clive's *Frankenstein* on his graveyard raids and torments Karloff's Monster with a whip and torch. Eventually, the Monster gets his vengeance, and again Frye dies with a bevy of screams... and hanging from the whip. Mae Clarke, *Frankenstein*'s heroine, remembered Frye stayed frighteningly in character on the set, "scuttling" like a spider in the soundstage shadows, never breaking his gruesome character.

"He scared the hell out of everyone!" recalled Clarke.

Frankenstein opened in New York City December 4, 1931. From that date onwards, Frye's life and career were never the same. The double dose of Renfield and Fritz, in two of the greatest horror classics ever made, cruelly typecast Frye with a sadistic showmanship; he was a walking victim of the *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* curse.

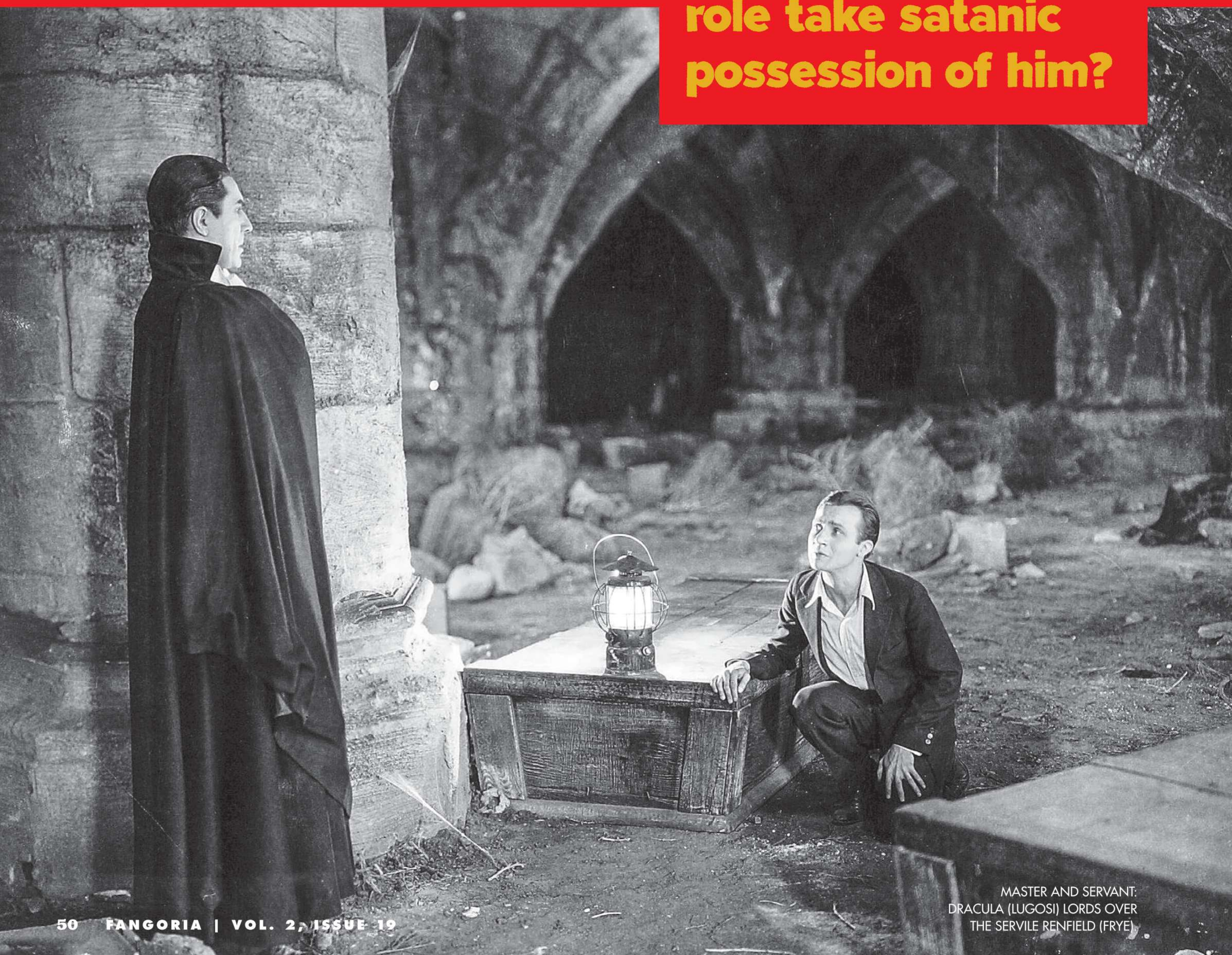
He took what he could get... such as the role of Herman, the bat-fondling "village idiot" of *The Vampire Bat*, starring Lionel Atwill and Fay Wray. "Bats – they soft – like cat!... They not bite Herman!" he baby-talks. Frye spoke out bitterly about his typecasting during *The Vampire Bat*:

> *If God is good, I will be able to play comedy, in which I was featured on Broadway for eight seasons, and in which no producers of motion pictures will give me a chance! And please, God, may it be before I go screwy, playing idiots, half-wits, and lunatics on the talking screen!*

He went back to Broadway – an ancient Chinaman in *Keeper of the Keys* (1933), a suicide husband in *Queer People* (1934) – but both plays flopped. James Whale, an admirer of Frye's talents, provided Frye a macabre showcase in *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) as "Karl," a village idiot/grave robber/laboratory assistant, screaming wildly as Karloff's Monster climactically throws him off the roof of the tower laboratory.

Come the 1940s, Frye appeared in a Hollywood stage revival of *Dracula*

Frye took satanic possession of the role... or did the role take satanic possession of him?



MASTER AND SERVANT: DRACULA (LUGOSI) LORDS OVER THE SERVILE RENFIELD (FRYE).

(1941) and played angry villagers in *The Ghost of Frankenstein* (1942) and *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* (1943). He also appeared in PRC's *Dead Men Walk* (1943), a quickie in which, as vampire George Zucco's slave, he was hysterical and hunchbacked – a Poverty Row cross between Renfield and Fritz.

He'd appeared in over 60 films, many of them bit roles. Because his acting career had become so precarious, and to aid the World War II effort, Frye began working the night shift at Douglas Aircraft in Santa Monica. He suffered heart problems there, refusing medical care due to his Christian Science faith. Things appeared to brighten when he was cast as Newton D. Baker, Secretary of War in 20th Century Fox's *Wilson*. He was enthusiastically looking forward to his first day's work on *Wilson* when:

Sunday night, November 7, 1943: Frye, Laura, and their 12-year-old son Dwight were coming home from a double feature at the Pantages Theatre – RKO's *A Lady Takes a Chance* and Universal's *Sherlock Holmes Faces Death*. They'd boarded a bus to take them up into the hills to their home below the HOLLYWOODLAND Sign, when Frye suffered a fatal heart attack. He was only 44 years old. His death certificate listed him as a "tool designer." Frye was buried in the Graceland section of Forest Lawn Memorial Park, Glendale.

Dwight David Frye, who died in 2003, remembered that his father received virtually no fan fame in his lifetime. On the rare occasion that a *Dracula* fan did recognize him and asked for an autograph, Dwight Frye, amazed that anyone recalled his pitiful Renfield, invariably signed with a grateful sentiment. Considering his macabre professional downfall, his inscription was heartbreaking:

"Thanks for remembering, Dwight Frye." 💀

IN 1925, JOSEPHINE HUTCHINSON (LATER TO PORTRAY "ELSA" IN *SON OF FRANKENSTEIN*) AND FRYE STARRED TOGETHER IN BROADWAY'S *A MAN'S MAN*.

Greg Mank is the author of many film and audio commentaries. His two most recent books: his novel Frankenstein's Witch: St. Lizzie, Pray for Us, *and* Of Mice and Men: Mental Enfeeblement, Racism, and Mercy-Killing in 1939 Hollywood.

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NICOLAS CAGE AT HOME IN HORROR

The acror's genre contributions span five decades — but the DNA of those performaces goes back even further

Nicolas Cage's history with horror predates his film career. In fact, it predates even the creation of Nicolas Cage. Like many of his generation, Nicolas Coppola, born in 1964, grew up consuming television and comic books. Unlike many of his generation, he received a supplemental education in classic films thanks to his father August, an academic, novelist, and artist who took his family to revival screenings of a wide array of classics. "When I was a kid, the other kids were seeing Disney and he was showing us movies like Fellini's *Juliet of the Spirits*," Cage told *Playboy*'s David Sheff in 1996. Fellini, Kurosawa, *The 400 Blows*, *Citizen Kane*, *The Nutty Professor* and others all made lasting impressions. Years later, selections from this youthful arthouse immersion would show up when asked to list his favorite movies. But it was the monsters that found their way into his dreams.

"That's when I discovered Max Schreck and *Nosferatu* and [*The Cabinet of*] *Dr. Caligari*, which gave me nightmares," Cage elaborated in the *Playboy* interview. And while, admittedly, the nightmares he went on to describe — dreams of being plucked from the toilet by a "giant blonde genie woman in a gold bikini" and "a clown scaling a building like Spider-Man" — seemingly don't owe too much to *Caligari*, *Nosferatu* or other German expressionist silent classics, their influence on Cage's work would be hard to miss, even if his first venture into horror movies didn't make direct homage to (and contain footage from) F.W. Murnau's expressionist vampire landmark *Nosferatu*.

Not that too many noticed at the time. Filmed immediately after Cage finished *Moonstruck*, an experience he told the *Dallas Morning News* left him with a rekindled desire to "make the kind of movies that are essentially punk gestures," *Vampire's Kiss* went largely unseen during its small-scale release in the summer of 1989. (That its competition included a different sort of bat-man probably didn't help.) The story of a New York literary agent who falls under the spell of a vampire (or does he?) and begins turning into a vampire himself (possibly), its cult began to form and spread in earnest when it arrived in video stores over a year later.

Vampire's Kiss has much to recommend it: a dark-side-of-'80s-New York exploration that extends themes from writer Joseph Minion's best-known screenplay, *After Hours*; atmospheric direction from Robert Bierman; some sharp supporting performances, particularly from María Conchita Alonso. But all are in the service of one element: Cage's performance. Cage stars as Peter Loew, a man whose love of literature might have long-ago led him to his current

GERMAN EXPRESSIONISM FIND ITS WAY INTO CAGE'S PETER LOEW IN *VAMPIRE'S KISS* (1988) AFTER HIS POSSIBLY IMAGINARY ENCOUNTER WITH RACHEL (JENNIFER BEALS).

profession but who's since thrown himself into the hedonistic deep end of the yuppie lifestyle. Clubs, cocaine, sex with strangers: Peter has it all. But it's not enough. His therapy sessions turn into rants of discontentment and an unexpected run-in with a bat seems to stir something in him that's fully aroused by a subsequent sexual encounter with a woman named Rachel (Jennifer Beals), a vampire who bites him in the neck. Unless she doesn't. Maybe she doesn't even exist at all.

Cage's work in the film has become the stuff of YouTube legend thanks to a handful of especially *outré* moments, most infamously a scene in which Cage eats a bug. (His impassioned recitation of the alphabet runs a close second). But a lot gets lost in cutting and pasting such moments. Cage has subsequently referred to *Vampire's Kiss* as a "laboratory" for acting ideas, and there's experimentation aplenty in the film. But it's experimentation in the service of a coherent vision of a world so dominated by toxic masculinity, before the term had been coined, that Pete's madness goes unnoticed. He can harass his assistant Alva (Alonso) in full view of his co-workers. What's to stop him from pushing that harassment into rape? Why not push his lust into bloodlust? When, as the film draws to a close, he wanders the street shouting "I'm a vampire," the confession draws only confusion and laughs on the streets of New York. It's too easy for the monster to pass as a man.

It's a funny performance, but funny in the service of a dark vision of privilege's abuses. It also captures how well Cage understands what horror can do, how what's amusing one moment can become terrifying the next (or both at once) and how one sort of shock can change to another with little warning. Peter wearing cheap, plastic vampire teeth looks ridiculous, but that doesn't make him any less deadly. Horror, like Cage, sometimes needs to go to extremes to find the truth. Cage has delivered memorable work in just about every genre, but *Vampire's Kiss* made horror feel like a natural home.

Nonetheless, a proper homecoming would take a while. Cage had an eventful, but horror-free '90s, beginning the decade with David Lynch's *Wild at Heart*, taking a side trip into warmhearted comedies like *It Could Happen to You*, owning 1995 with a pair of powerful performances in *Kiss of Death* and *Leaving Las Vegas* (the latter of which earned him a Best Actor Oscar), and becoming one of the biggest stars in the world via a string of action movies. It was via the latter that he picked up the clout to start his own production company, Saturn Films, whose earliest projects included *Shadow of the Vampire*, a darkly comic horror film written by Steven Katz, directed by E. Elias Merhige, and set during the production of *Nosferatu*. The central conceit: star Max Schreck wasn't just playing a vampire. He was a vampire. Surprisingly, Schreck was played by Cage's once and future co-star Willem Dafoe and not Cage, despite Cage's original plans to take the role. He had business elsewhere. Horror had to wait.

It perhaps should have waited a little longer. Working with writer and director Neil LaBute, Cage returned to horror with a remake of one of the genre's towering classics, *The Wicker Man*. It proved resistant to translation (or at least this particular attempt at translation). Where the original film, written by Anthony Shaffer and directed by Robin Hardy, played off the tension between a puritanical police officer (Edward Woodward) and a pagan community tucked away on a remote island presided over by an imperious Christopher Lee, LaBute's version attempts to use a similar premise to explore a conflict between the sexes.

Cage has subsequently referred to *Vampire's Kiss* as a "laboratory" for acting ideas, and there's experimentation aplenty in the film.

That said conflict at one point takes the form of Cage's character, a police officer drawn to an island by the disappearance of an ex-lover's daughter, punching out women while wearing a bear costume, sums up the film's problems. LaBute seems interested in mixing comedy and horror but the film's never particularly scary and its biggest laughs are unintentional. Like *Vampire's Kiss*,

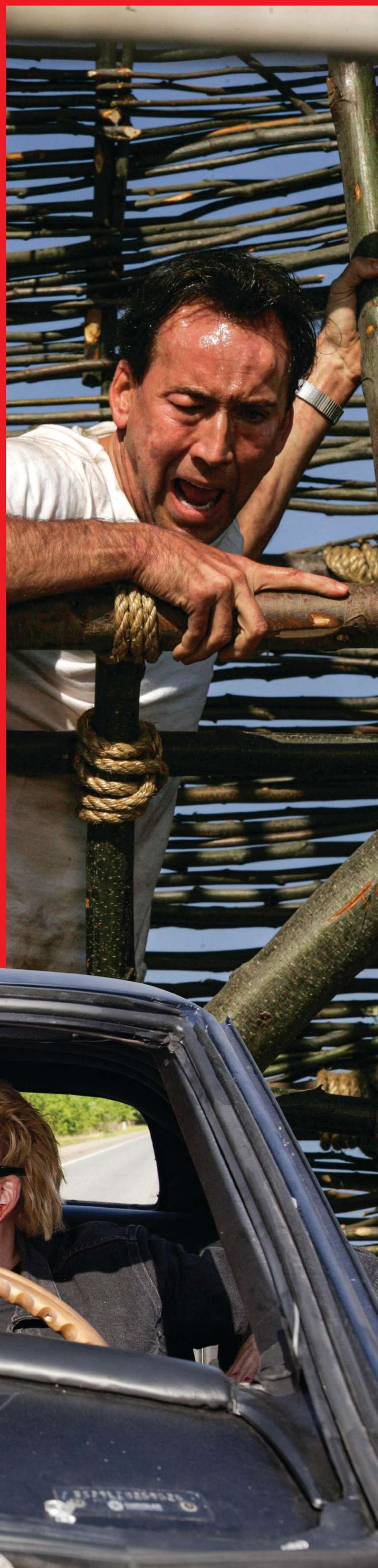
it became YouTube fodder. Unlike *Vampire's Kiss*, it's most charitably described as a misfire.

That description could also be applied to many of the horror and horror-adjacent Cage films released in the years after *The Wicker Man*. Both 2007's *Ghost Rider* and its 2012 follow-up *Ghost Rider: Spirit of Vengeance*, in which Cage plays Marvel's cycle-riding, hellish hero, have their charms, including Cage's choice to play the character as a quiet guy who enjoys the Carpenters and nature videos. But neither the original nor the sequel, directed by the *Crank* team of Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor, can find a middle ground between horror movies and superheroics.

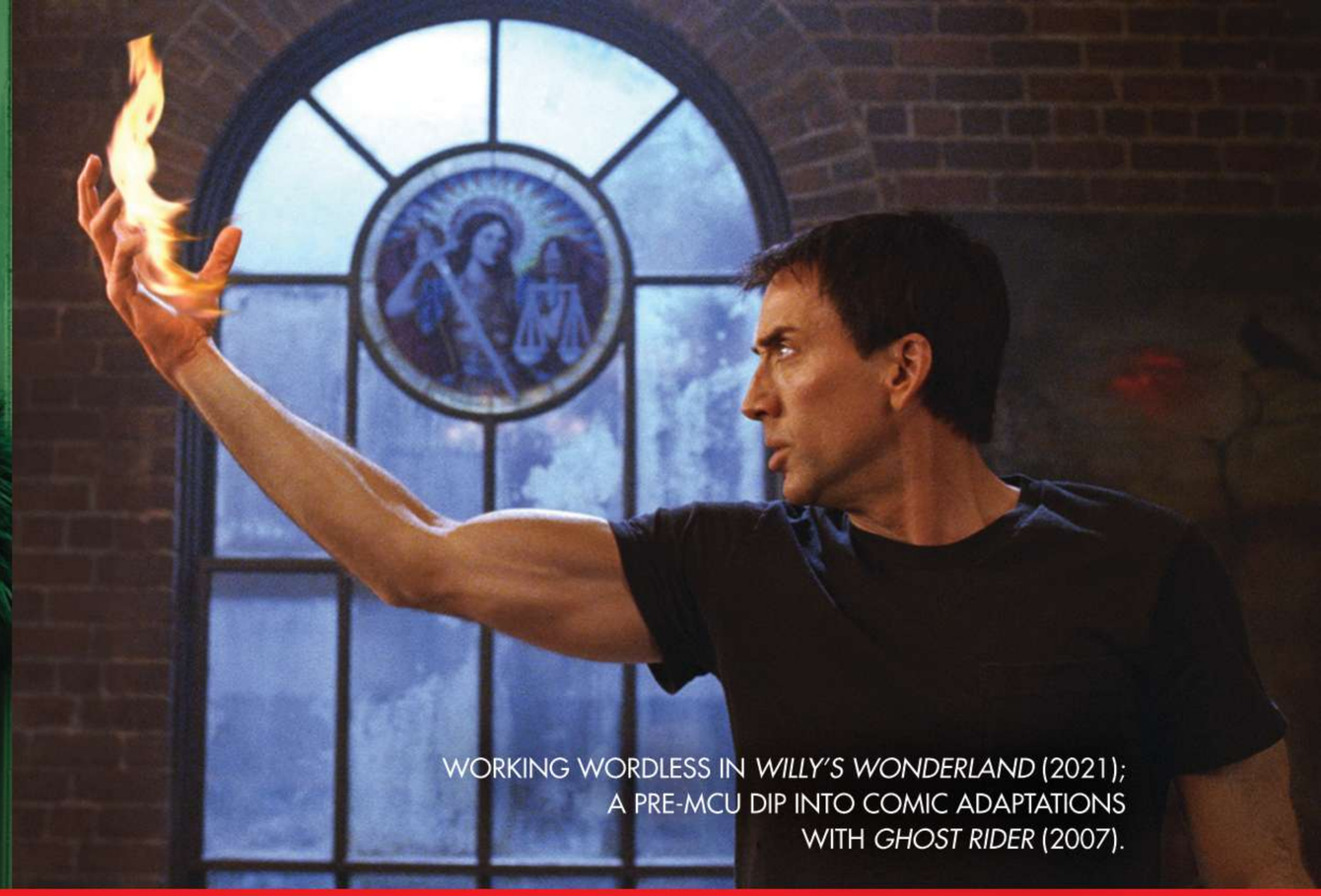
Released in 2011, *Drive Angry* plays like the for-grownups-only version of a *Ghost Rider* film, casting Cage as a refugee from Hell with twin interests in vengeance and fast cars, but its undeniable energy never translates into a fun film. It arrived nearly a year after *Season of the Witch*, a misbegotten attempt to meld a modern blockbuster fantasy film (albeit a modestly budgeted one) with a classic Hammer horror film (complete with a Christopher Lee cameo).

The latter two were among the last Cage films to receive a wide theatrical release for a time as the actor entered a financially mandated direct-to-VOD wilderness that kept him steadily employed and able to pay off some widely reported debts. Cage was especially prolific during the early years of the VOD era, but this period, perhaps surprisingly, contains little in the way of horror movies. In fact, horror is pretty much confined to *Pay the Ghost*, a Shyamalan-esque chiller from 2015 in which Cage's character comes to suspect that his son's disappearance might be tied to supernatural forces. Directed by Uli Edel (*Last Exit to Brooklyn*), it's similar to many Cage VOD films: entirely watchable, not particularly memorable, and featuring a solid Cage performance.

It was later in the '10s that Cage turned to horror with greater regularity. The genre greeted him warmly as he found his way into a string of remarkable films that played to his strengths as an actor — and confirmed his understanding of the genre's capabilities. First among them: *Mom and Dad*, written and directed by Brian Taylor (co-director of *Ghost Rider: Spirit of Vengeance*). A not-for-the-faint-of-heart black comedy — if only for a scene that puts a newborn baby in mortal danger — it uses a simple premise to let loose chaos: with little warning or explanation, parents find themselves seized with an uncontrollable urge to kill their children. But folded into the intergenerational violence is an unexpectedly poignant depiction of the indignities of middle age.



GOING FOR IT IN 3D WITH AMBER HEARD IN 2011'S *DRIVE ANGRY*; (ABOVE) 2006'S *THE WICKER MAN* DID NOT LAND AS INTENDED.



WORKING WORDLESS IN *WILLY'S WONDERLAND* (2021); A PRE-MCU DIP INTO COMIC ADAPTATIONS WITH *GHOST RIDER* (2007).

Cage co-stars opposite Selma Blair as, respectively, Brent and Kendall, the parents of a family of four on a downward trajectory. Kendall is bored. Brent is struggling with a flagging career, his own memories of his carefree youth, and the freedom his kids now enjoy while he tries to recapture some faded glory in his limited free time. The meat of the film is its well-choreographed violence but its heart belongs to a flashback scene in which Brent and Kendall share their disappointment with how their lives have turned out and all the time that's slipped away from them. The kid-killing mayhem might be the stuff of wild midnight movies, but the mid-life ennui grounds it in real emotions.

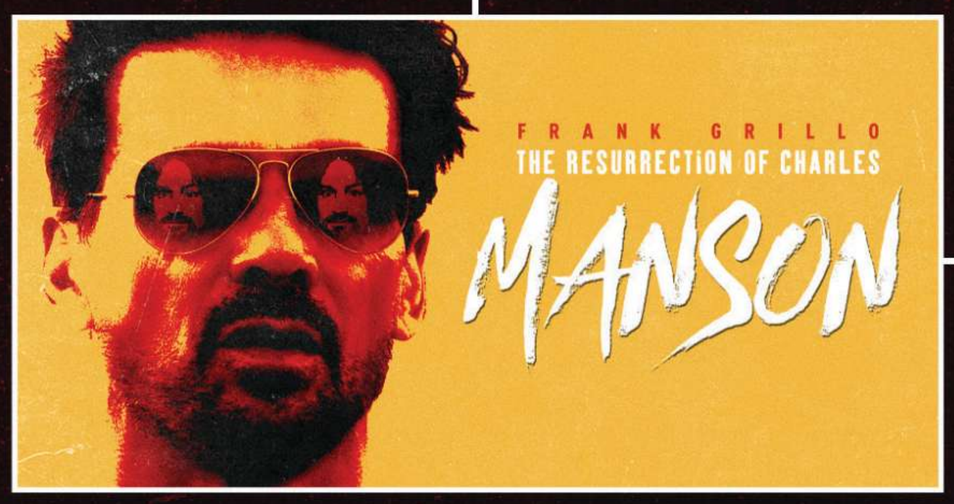
Mom and Dad seemed to usher in an era of horror movies that allowed Cage to challenge himself as an actor. *Willy's Wonderland* (2021), in which Cage battles the evil animatronic characters haunting a failed family restaurant, can do little to disguise its limited budget but Cage's wordless performance — given sparse dialogue, Cage suggested to director Kevin Lewis he "go full Harpo Marx" for the role — keeps it captivating. For *Color Out of Space* (2019) he depicts the complete, ultimately literal, meltdown of an ordinary man attempting to start a new life in the country (complete with alpacas) only to encounter an unexpected problem in the form of a malevolent meteor. Whether the assignment required him to be goofy or gooey, Cage was game.

It was in this stretch, too, that he delivered one of the best performances of his career. As with *Vampire's Kiss*, it's easy to reduce Panos Cosmatos's 2018 film *Mandy* to a handful of extreme moments, as when Cage's Red Miller, a lumberjack mourning the murder of his wife Mandy (Andrea Riseborough), consumes an entire bottle of vodka over the course of a single, two-minute shot while sitting on a bathroom floor wearing a t-shirt and a pair of briefs. But by the time that scene arrives we've gotten to know Red, and witnessed a loving marriage of a pair of misfits who've found comfort in each other. Cage makes his loss feel raw and real. It's hurt and loss that fuels the ensuing lust for revenge. Also as with *Vampire's Kiss*, it's an example of Cage drawing on an understanding of the genre's potential. With the actor as its emotional center, Richard Stanley's Lovecraft adaptation even a movie with a vomiting Cheddar Goblin and a character called "Fuck Pig" could still break your heart.

That understanding comes from an appreciation of the genre that seems destined to continue past *Renfield*; Cage recently signed on to Osgood Perkins' upcoming *Longlegs*. It's a deeply rooted appreciation, one that Cage even got to dramatize in a scene that wound up confined to the deleted scenes of the self-aware 2022 comedy *The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent*. In his final confrontation with the brash, young version of himself who's haunted him through the whole film, Cage plunges into a black-and-white dreamscape modeled after *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. This spirit of the man he used to be, it turns out, has been controlling him Caligari-style, and they fight one another on expressionistic sets inspired by *Face/Off*, *Leaving Las Vegas*, and other Cage films. In the end, it's one of his earliest, and scariest, cinematic memories that's shaped the psyche of the fictional Cage and, it's easy to conclude, the psyche of the man playing him. The scene didn't make the final cut of the film, but maybe it didn't have to. There's evidence of it in everything Cage does. 💀

CAGE FORGED A MODERN CLASSIC WITH *MANDY* (2018).

OUT NOW



COMING SOON

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Exit Interview With The Vampire

On Renfield and the Wages of Blood

By Richard Newby

Do you like your job? Does it make you feel valued? Do you feel like you provide a necessary service through the work you do? Where do you see yourself in five years? For some, the answers to these questions may come easier than they do for others. For many, the answers probably require conditional information: salary, familial commitments, health benefits, travel, upward mobility, your boss, all the strings that allow you to be puppeteered throughout your weeks on the clock.

The work we do defines us as individuals. We may try to convince ourselves otherwise, aggressively claiming we are not our jobs, but never successfully. So often, we're identified by our professions. During social introductions, one of the first questions we get never fails: "What do you do for a living?" Even when your name slips from someone's memory, the job remains, "You're the nurse, right?" "He was in sales," "She is the writer," "You're Dracula's assistant." Ok, so Renfield isn't quite so easy a name to forget, but he too is defined by the job he does. And what a job it is!

Bram Stoker described Dracula's long-suffering, insect-consuming servant or familiar as "morbidly excitable," and now R. M. Renfield has his best reason for excitement yet, as he finally takes the spotlight in his own Universal monster movie. Chris McKay's *Renfield*, starring Nicholas Hoult as the title character, and Nicolas Cage as his boss, Count Dracula, takes the form of a horror-comedy - a modernized look at a grueling work

experience with an awful, overly demanding boss. Hoult joins the long list of memorable Renfield actors: Alexander Granach, Dwight Frye, Tom Waits, and my personal favorite, Peter MacNicol. While these past portrayals have varied tonally, they all share a commonality in that Renfield cannot succeed. The servant cannot become the master.

The case of Renfield is a fascinating one. He's up for the ultimate promotion: immortality. The only thing it costs is his sanity. While Stoker doesn't delve deeply into the character's backstory outside of his place as an inmate in an asylum, and though the film adaptations have often positioned him as Jonathan Harker's predecessor, there is something of an everyman quality that gets overlooked in screen translations (I blame it on the insect eating). What is Renfield's search for immortality if not an obsession with legacy? And for many of us, our careers are part of that same fixation. What will we leave behind for our families? How will we be remembered? Will the work we do or create last? *Dracula* is a novel of metaphors and 20th-century anxieties, so why should Renfield be any different? While most of us would probably like to believe we're Harker, or Quincy, or Seward, or Van Helsing, or Mina, there are more than a few who probably fall closest to Renfield – we're a bit mad in what we would do for the job given the unrequited promise of something better. It's a theme explored throughout a number of workplace horror films: *Severance*, *Exam*, *The Belko Experiment*, *Mayhem*. We continue to come back to this question of what we're willing to sacrifice in order to climb the corporate ladder. That's the lure of capitalism and the lie of trickle-down theory, unless the thing trickling down happens to be blood.

There is also the issue of morality when it comes to Renfield. While he originally aids Dracula in procuring Mina Harker, he later suffers a crisis of conscience that leads him to betray his master, which Dracula later repays, in the novel's telling, by breaking his neck and smashing in his skull. Renfield's change of heart, his willingness to sacrifice the promise of immortality for the safety of this woman, raises the question of whether Renfield's noble intentions were simply drowned out by being so close to the presence of evil for so long, or if his interest in Mina is just another form of self-interest. His guilt is noted in the novel, but what need does one have for guilt and concern over the fate of one's soul if they buy wholeheartedly into the promise of immortality? Perhaps Renfield, if only in temporary moments of sanity, recognizes his master's lies. Those brief bouts of sanity make his predicament all the more terrifying, because in those moments he's forced to answer questions much harder than whether he feels valued or likes his boss. Questions we should all be asking, such as: what do our jobs take from us? What do they turn us into? Not vampires' familiars, most of us, but the jobs can be draining, and leave us feeling less human all the same.

That's the lure of capitalism and the lie of trickle-down theory, unless the thing trickling down happens to be blood.

And while we'll see what the new film has in store for poor Renfield (and if this latest iteration fares any better than his predecessors), there are plenty of examples in horror media of characters whose professional positions reveal thorny, or perhaps fanged, existential truths about themselves.

TALK ABOUT SELLING OUT: RENFIELD (NICHOLAS HOULT, THIS PAGE AND FACING) DID NOT READ THE FINE PRINT.

PHOTOS BY MICHELE K. SHORT COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL PICTURES

Renfield's Dracula is not the first time we've seen Nicolas Cage in a vampire role. Ironically, though also perhaps an intentional bit of meta-casting, Cage played a Renfield-esque character in 1988's *Vampire's Kiss*. In Robert Bierman's black comedy-horror film, Cage is Peter Loew, a New York literary agent who also happens to be a walking satire of '80s yuppies. Loew is prone to outbursts and suffers from mental instability brought on by the pressures from his job and the lack of love in his life. One night, he goes home with a woman from a bar, Rachel (Jennifer Beals), who reveals herself to be a vampire and feeds on him. However,

Loew is unreliable and the incident, as well as his sudden transformation, may all be delusions. The reality of Rachel and her status as a vampire is less important than the fact that once Loew begins to believe he's a vampire, he drops certain pretenses of humanity and places his faith in the mythology of the monster – an aversion to sunlight, the allure of bats, the need to consume blood, and the lack of immediate consequences in the toxic work environment he creates, which is its own testosterone-filled vial of immortality.

Now, Loew, as his namesake suggests, was never all that well-intentioned to begin with, as we see from the treatment of his secretary, Alva (María Conchita Alonso). But once he becomes consumed by the idea that he is turning into a vampire, all bets are off. The meme-ification of the movie and its prominent presence in the ever-popular YouTube video "Nicolas Cage Losing His Shit" have stripped away some of the context and shock of Loew's behavior. But the idea of being touched by darkness allows Loew to bury himself in it, partaking in abuses verbal, physical, and sexual. He gives himself over to being a predator, feasts first on a cockroach, then a pigeon, then attempts or commits (the film makes it unclear though no less vile in either case) to rape Alva, and ultimately murders a young woman at a club, tearing out her throat with a set of plastic vampire teeth and drinking her blood until it makes him vomit.

In the aftermath, Loew walks around the streets of New York, clothes torn, disheveled, and spattered in blood, despondent and moaning, entertaining imaginary sessions with his therapist in his head. It is strikingly close (and intentionally so) to the image we have of the homeless and jobless passed by on the streets of every major metropolitan city. And it is an image that, in theory, is supposed to elicit empathy. Yet, *Vampire's Kiss* questions whether we should feel bad for Loew, particularly given all of the terrible things he did. Yes, his therapy sessions have brought us in proximity to his inner thoughts, revealing the source of his depression. But did the stresses of his job that brought on this vampiric flight of fancy change Peter Loew, or simply reveal the monster that was there? "I'm a vampire! I'm a vampire! I'm a vampire!" he proclaims through the streets earlier in the film, but in hindsight it feels less like a revelation of what he's become and more of a confirmation of what he always was.

Vampire's Kiss feels of a piece with *American Psycho*, a later take on '80s yuppie culture that's only slightly more self-serious. While there are no vampires in Mary Harron's adaptation of Bret Easton Ellis' novel, Patrick Bateman (Christian Bale) does make for quite the vampiric figure. From his elaborate skincare routine, obsession with appearance, callous superiority, and double-life as a serial killer, Bateman isn't all that different from the Count. Yet, rather than relying on who he employs, Bateman's indulgence in his darkest and most savage impulses are made easier by his job, which is simply a means to an end for the lifestyle he wishes to have. It's the physical display of wealth, the ability to acquire anything (except for those initial reservations at Dorsia), that allows him to lure victims into his orbit. That's what separates the modern monster of the 20th century that Stoker created from those of earlier ages. Dark woods, caverns, and hushed voices in the shadows have been replaced by fine dining, brightly lit, luxurious dwellings, and Huey Lewis and the News.

Bateman's actual day-to-day work as an investment banker is even less important to him than Peter Loew's job as a literary agent. The job is merely a mask, a means to give definition to a vast evil and create the illusion that Bateman is attached to something. "There is an idea of Patrick Bateman; some kind of abstraction. But there is no real me; only an entity, something illusory. And though I can hide my cold gaze, and you can shake my hand and feel flesh gripping yours and maybe you can even sense our lifestyles are probably comparable … I simply am not there," Bateman informs his captive audience. The horror of Bateman's job isn't what it turns him into, but

PETER LOEW (NICOLAS CAGE) AND PATRICK BATEMAN (CHRISTIAN BALE, RIGHT) REPRESENT THE YUPPIE WORKPLACE NIGHTMARE.

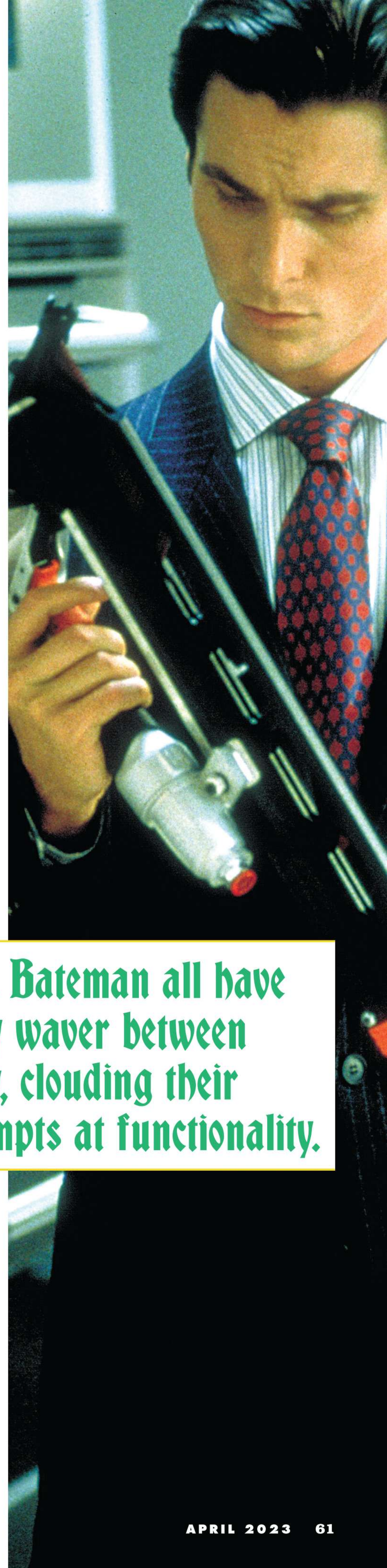
what it conceals from us. We should dare to imagine how many people whose jobs place them in positions of power, officers of the law, executives, politicians, are just imitations of humanity making it all the easier to get into the business of bloodshed. *American Psycho* drives that point home at the end as Bateman listens to his colleagues discuss whether Ronald Reagan is secretly a psychopath. "He presents himself as this harmless old codger, but inside..."

Inside the job may be very different than the job as we present it to the outside world. Surely confidence, imposter syndrome, a slight bending of truth when it comes to our skill sets or ambitions, noble or not, are common interior facets we typically don't share publicly. But what if it was more than that? What if there was a complete separation between how our minds perceived the job and what we actually did? It would certainly make it easier to contend with our moral failures, without resulting in insanity and concern for the mortal soul that afflicts Renfield. That's the conceit bbehind Dan Erickson's TV series *Severance*, in which employees of the mysterious company Lumon Industries have undergone a procedure that separates their work memories from their personal memories. There's no vampires or serial killers, but there is a lurking sense of horror, as employees are drained of life to sustain a mysterious ideal.

Mark S. (Adam Scott), one of Lumon's employees, is a good man, and his reasons for joining the severance program are understandable, but he's still subject to the same questions we'd ask when considering Renfield, Peter Loew, or Patrick Bateman. What does the job ask of him? What does it turn him into? What does it reveal or hide? The answers to some of those questions unveil a mass conspiracy, one that highlights Lumon employees' ability to have very different lives on the outside than they do in the workplace – different priorities, different personalities, and different ideas of right and wrong. Which life defines the individual? That "innie" at work, or the "outie" who remains ignorant of the job? Both do, and neither self is free from the weight of their actions, even if they aren't aware of those actions. A puppet who can't see the strings is still a puppet.

Renfield, Loew, and Bateman all have moments where they waver between madness and clarity, clouding their perception and attempts at functionality. It's the seeming impossibility of holding two seemingly contradictory, core functions inside oneself – solicitor and procurer, literary agent and vampire, banker and barbarian, dual functions which severance could permit. But for Mark, whose circumstances change depending on his work life or personal life, his inherent goodness remains a constant. While less reluctant versions of his core function of empathy, curiosity, and justice, differ between his innie and his outie, he is certainly more unified than his co-workers, at least based on the information we've been given in the series thus far. There is no monster hiding in Mark. Thus, unlike Renfield, he is able to, if not break the bonds of servitude, then at least bend the chains, in his efforts to take down Lumon and discover what exactly his job is.

Perhaps we're called to jobs that speak to truths about ourselves, even if those truths, like the destabilization of a massive corporation, are unconscious and lack premeditation. If there is a monstrosity that is revealed by our chosen trades, be it through a truck driver dueling a car on the highway, a custodian with dreams best left unturned, a nurse who's also a number one fan, or an actor whose comedy disguises his barbaric nature, then perhaps it's the monsters that are already there within us, or the monsters we confidentially hope to become that shape our work. Any attempt to deny or hide that truth for too long will drive us to lunacy, like poor Renfield. So, all that being said, let's get back to work. 💀



Renfield, Loew, and Bateman all have moments where they waver between madness and clarity, clouding their perception and attempts at functionality.

THE RETURN OF THE HORROR HIMBO

By Jaden Oberkrom

AT LONG LAST, HOT JOCKS WITH BIG HEARTS AND EMPTY HEADS HAVE RETURNED TO OUR SCREENS.

Though the horror himbo has been around for decades, the last couple of years have provided a welcome boom in the archetype's popularity. Chad from *Scream* (2022), Booker from *Freaky* and their brothers have wrapped their letterman jackets around our hearts. But there's so much more to these characters than just buff dudes with nothing going on upstairs. The modern horror himbo redefines the trope entirely, with his pure heart overshadowing all negative assumptions we might make about him. They may not always make it out alive, but horror himbos will win you over before they meet their demise, looking great while they do it.

By its original definition, a himbo is an attractive but unintelligent man. But throw any character reductions out the window. Here in the horror world, rules are constantly bent and reinvented, and a scroll through social media will show you how beloved these guys are. A once-derogatory phrase has been reclaimed, and now it's a phenomenon we can all enjoy.

"Himbo is a term of endearment," *Freaky* screenwriter Michael Kennedy says of Booker (Uriah Shelton) and his kin. "Himbo means a heart-of-gold guy who will be a ride-or-die for the protagonist. It's a subversion of the bimbo character in all the best ways. You modernize it by changing the gender. He's pretty to look at, and he's kind of silly, but then you give him a new dimension where he is affable and lovable."

There comes a point in many horror films where the protagonist must convince a friend that something outlandish is happening. Most of the time, that friend isn't so easy to convince. But the himbo is always ready to go to bat for his loved ones, no matter how unbelievable their predicament may seem. And there's something empowering about seeing raw kindness from a character who looks a lot like the guy who picked on you in high school.

Chad Meeks-Martin, played by Mason Gooding, is another fan favorite who will return in the highly anticipated *Scream VI*. James Vanderbilt, screenwriter (with Guy Busick) of *Scream* and *Scream VI*, was crucial in gifting the world with the sweet, handsome Chad. It's impossible to talk about modern horror himbos without acknowledging how Vanderbilt and company redefined the stereotype to perfection.

"We tried to build characters to specifically have all of these John Hughes-world contradictions," Vanderbilt says. "We loved this idea of a character who was on the surface a jock but is then dating a very alternative-looking girl. He really cares about her, and he's worried about her. His undoing is the fact that he goes after his girlfriend because he loves her."

It would be easy for the jock character to be concerned with nothing but sex, sports and where he stands in the social hierarchy. Turning an oversaturated cliché on its head is a thoughtful way to keep the genre fresh, and the *Scream* franchise was built on playing with clichés and expectations. Here's hoping Chad's warmth (and muscles) help him survive in the Big Apple come March.

Putting a himbo in danger raises the stakes even more in a horror film, like watching a golden retriever chase a tennis ball and feeling sick to our stomachs when the ball rolls onto a busy road. The himbo is always looking out for his friends, protecting others instead of himself. It's a tragedy when our himbo meets his end while trying to be the hero, but when he ends up living to see another day? Pure triumph. Any way you cut it is a recipe for success.

One important classifying quality of a himbo is that he goes about his role comfortably as a side character. Some may consider Ash from *The Evil Dead* franchise a himbo, but Ash is in control of his narrative. The modern horror himbo takes pride in being a support system, always ready to take the fall for our main character(s) at any given moment. From this past year alone, Greg from *Bodies Bodies Bodies* (Lee Pace) and Angel from *Nope* (Brandon Perea) are arguably the best characters in their respective films, and with half the screentime. So why are these types of characters pulling in most of our attention lately?

"I think that, as time goes on, we are just more accepting of a wider spectrum of people," says *Queer for Fear: The History of Queer Horror* producer Renée Bever. "We let men be stupid. We appreciate different parts of masculinity than other generations have. There is a huge influence from younger generations on what we appreciate about fluidity and the spectrum of gender and expression."

The trend may have revived itself in 2020 with *Freaky* and grew throughout last year, but it's showing no signs of stopping in 2023. Those who saw this year's *Sick* likely found themselves won over by Dylan Sprayberry's character DJ Cole. The classic trope of the jealous ex-boyfriend gets thrown into a blender as DJ worries about nothing more than the mental and physical health of his ex-girlfriend Parker (Gideon Adlon). We're not expecting these depths when we first meet DJ, but he flips the script on us, making his character one of the most memorable parts of the film.

And all we can hope is that the trend continues. In a genre where dread and despair are around every corner, there is nothing better than finding comfort in genuinely nice guys who are easy on the eyes. And the most exciting thing about horror is its constant desire to evolve. Today's himbo looks completely different from the himbo of twenty years ago – so who knows what he will look like twenty years from now.

When we're looking back, those decades in the future, we can be proud to have contributed with our fandom to the horror himbo craze of the 2020s. These gentlemen are handsome on the outside, but even more beautiful on the inside. Their biceps are huge, and their hearts even huger. And we love them, because they love everything. 💀

PHOTOS COURTESY OF A24, PARAMOUNT PICTURES AND UNIVERSAL PICTURES

MAYHEM

BY KALYN CORRIGAN

Director Anthony DiBlasi and FX Artists Josh and Sierra Russell update 2014's *LAST SHIFT* with an increase in scale, scope and splatter.

A tortured soul sporting flesh stoked by the flames of Hell. A jaded officer of the law possessed by the ghosts of his past. Leash-led bipeds walked like dogs. A deranged cult hellbent on ascending into the starless night. Skin-eating swine. Exploding heads. Primordial evil. This is the world of Anthony DiBlasi's *Malum*, and it's coming to melt your face off.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RUSSELLFX

OFFICER PRICE (SAM BROOKS) HAS A FACE ONLY A MALUM COULD LOVE.
OPPOSITE PAGE: CLARKE WOLFE TRANSFORMED INTO "DEMON DOROTHEA."

The reboot of the director's own 2014 film *Last Shift* finds Officer Jessica Loren (Jessica Sula) trying to learn what went wrong during her late father's final day at his police station, and her inquiries unleash a feverish onslaught of ghosts, cult members, malice and murder. For this update, DiBlasi decided to dedicate his bigger budget to boosting the effects department, creating a bloody, thrilling ride that doesn't let up until the end credits roll. FANGORIA recently chatted with DiBlasi and Josh and Sierra Russell of Russell FX to discuss their latest collaboration.

"I think there was a trend in horror that 'slow-burn' equaled 'elevated,' and therefore made 'horror' less of a dirty word," explains DiBlasi. "And I love slow-burn horror. But there is also a place in the genre to make movies that just scare the hell out of people. A movie you can take a date or a friend to because you want to watch them jump out of their seats for 90 minutes. I think it's important in filmmaking to deliver the promise of the genre, and movies have become so subversive now, that you can't always bet on getting what you paid for. If I see a comedy, I want to laugh; if I see a drama maybe I want to cry; if I see a horror film, you better scare me, or else I feel cheated."

Fair point: in a world where glacially paced thrillers have become the norm, many filmmakers have veered away from B-movie territory in favor of making something more socially acceptable and, often, more profitable. However, with films like *Terrifier 2* bringing in the big bucks, it's clear that there's room for both kinds of genre films at the box office. White knuckling a box of popcorn and squirming in your seat doesn't necessarily mean you're watching a movie without real merit.

"You can deliver the goods *and* tell a compelling story," says Josh. "That balance has been overlooked in recent years and created a crevasse between 'highbrow' horror and straight camp. Studios are nearsighted and chase trends that inevitably die off and the cycle eats itself alive once again… rinse/repeat. I think this kind of movie is refreshing because you can watch it and just be entertained, but you can also dig in and think about it further if you want."

When it came time to reboot his 2014 film *Last Shift* for Welcome Villain Films, DiBlasi knew he wanted to bring aboard a special effects team who would really make his story sing. That's why he hired Russell FX, the ringleaders behind the new *Hellraiser*, to up the ante.

"Anthony was absolutely wonderful to work with," Sierra remembers fondly. "He respects every person working for the movie and doesn't treat it like a hierarchy. I also appreciate any director that will get bloody and be hands-on. Sometimes Anthony may have been having too much fun with the blood."

As three lifelong Clive Barker fans, and especially considering DiBlasi's ten-plus years of working with Barker on projects like *The Midnight Meat Train* and *Book of Blood*, the DiBlasi/Russell collaboration was a no-brainer. "The fact that they had just done *Hellraiser*, I was like, 'Perfect, we need to have them on this movie,'" says DiBlasi. "There are some Barker-esque inspirations in *Malum* for sure, so it's this natural progression."

SAM BROOKS HAS NO FACE BUT IS STILL CHILL.

FROM THE LOOKS OF THESE OTHER IMAGES, JESSICA SULA GETS OFF EASY IN *MALUM*.

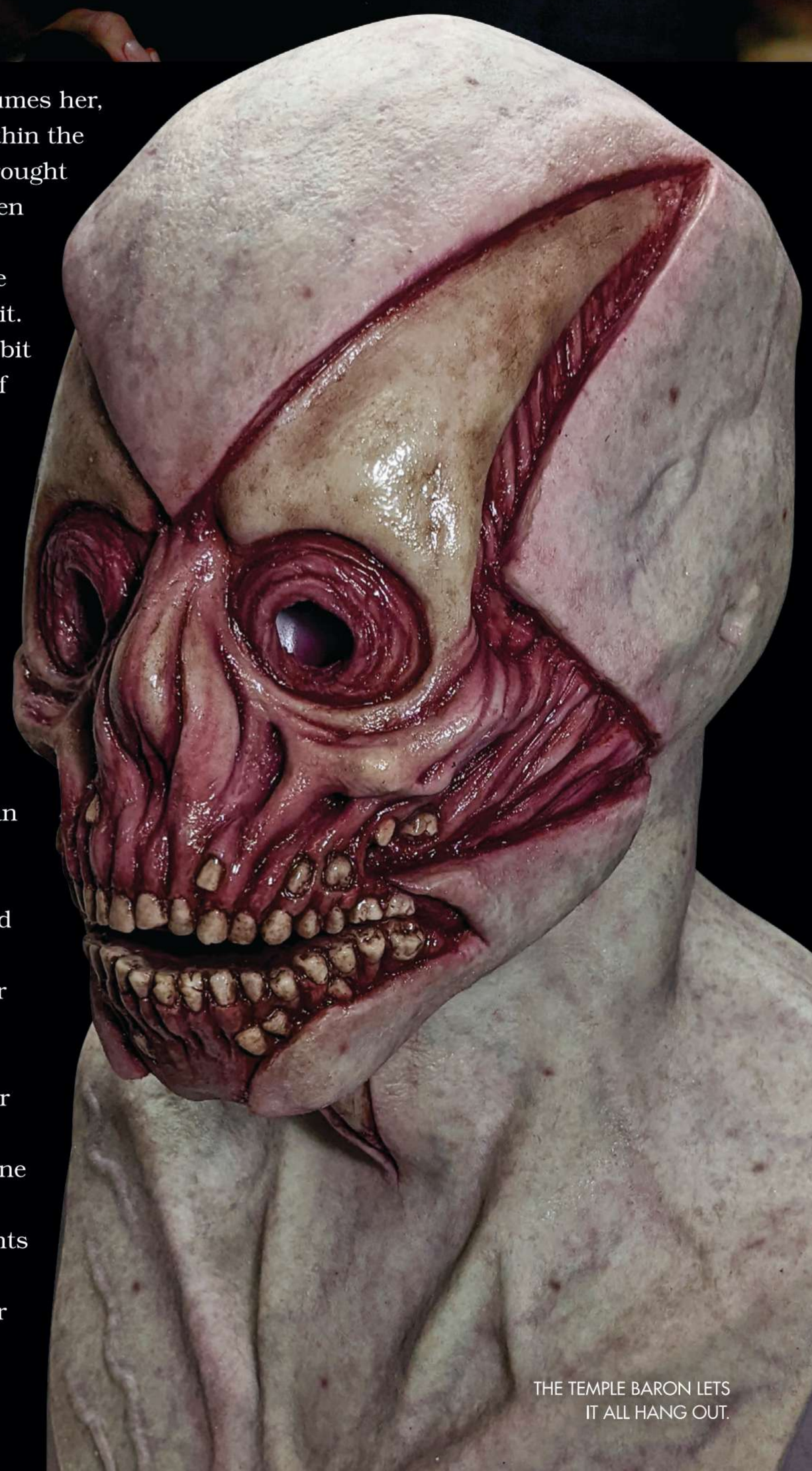
PHOTOS COURTESY OF RUSSELLFX AND WELCOME VILLAIN FILMS / 4SAKE MEDIA

However, despite sharing a similar background, the gang was careful not to simply repeat what they had done before. As Sierra explains, "There is always a conversation to make sure certain styles don't repeat and take away from each singular story of movies we're a part of. That said, I still am highly influenced by many artists, including Barker."

"The Church of Barker," as DiBlasi affectionately deems their mutual devotion, pulls from many sources of inspiration. Take for instance the character of Betty (Monroe Cline) – or as the trio refer to her, "Bashed Face Betty" – a victim of the film's villainous cult in *Malum*. In the film, the young woman's skull is beaten in with a baseball bat before being fed to a pig. By the time Jessica encounters Betty's ghost at the station, her face is akin to a bloody, blooming plant, part of her leg is missing, and she's morphed into an unholy fusion of sow and human sacrifice.

"I showed them some real references of baseball bat deaths, but we wanted to go more abstract with it," says DiBlasi. "I sent them some paintings I liked. It generates from her being hit in the head with this baseball bat and turning her face into this abstract thing, and then taking that and then pushing it to a further level, but also bringing in some elements of the pig. The pig consumes her, and then she lives within the pig, and then she's brought to the station. So, when we see this creature design work, there are some pig elements in it. A bit of the ear and a bit of the eye and some of the teeth."

For Betty's inspiration, DiBlasi and the Russells turned to, believe it or not, classic art. "One reference for Bashed Face Betty was Francis Bacon," Sierra notes. "I love doing surreal, Cronenbergian sculptures, so I was very excited for her, and I think she turned out cute as a button. We didn't have time or budget for a full fake body. We did green screen makeup for her missing leg and the wonderful Monroe Cline was a dancer, so she was great at movements and was a real champion wearing her bizarre makeup."



THE TEMPLE BARON LETS IT ALL HANG OUT.

As a director, DiBlasi shows an understanding of not only the limitations, but also the importance of his film's effects, something not lost on Josh. "It was high pressure and a short schedule, but he never lost his cool. Example: the day of the hanging scene, an important FX moment, we were running out of time and something was going to have to give to make the day. He and I side-barred about elements that could be shot later with a pickup crew at our shop. So, rather than sacrifice the impact of the scene, he worked around the limitations. There's never enough time, but there are creative ways to *make* time. That's the mark of a good captain."

"I think due to the experience I got from Clive, they're always the first team that I'm really talking to in detail," notes DiBlasi. "People don't give effects enough time on tight shoots, but you just have to make room for it."

DiBlasi also acknowledges the weight of adding authenticity to movie gags, which is why he and RFX took full advantage of their location's working gun range during a scene with a literal headshot. "Josh and I have always wanted to make an exploding head via shotgun, the Tom Savini *Maniac* way, or the Dick Smith *Scanners* way," says Sierra. "It looks the best. We've been preaching it for years. I was very happy to read that the head that gets shot with a shotgun was set in a shooting range. We didn't have to convince anyone, everyone was on board. I was just upset that I didn't get to shoot the shotgun. It was glorious." Josh couldn't agree more: "The only way to blow off a head with a shotgun is to blow it off with a shotgun. Everything else looks fake."

"It's the little things in life that bring me joy. For this movie, no blood is too much."
- Sierra Russell

Oddly enough, a vastly underrated component of makeup and creature effects is the blood. The viscosity, the color, the spatter pattern – these are all key to making movie blood appear lifelike. "There's different bloods for everything, and we aren't scared of it. Part of the art is knowing when the blood is taking over

"BASHED FACE BETTY" (MONROE CLINE) GOES ON A JOURNEY IN *MALUM*.

the makeup and how to apply blood stylistically if needed. But then you may find yourself cursing what a beautiful job you've done to have to replicate," Sierra laments.

As DiBlasi puts it, "Sierra is like the Pablo Picasso of blood. Sierra would come in and she'd do a little dab, like she's really looking at it, and I'm like, 'Josh, maybe add a little more blood.' And he'd come in, and he'd be like the Jackson Pollock of blood. He'd just throw a bucket on there, and she'd be like, 'What the hell?!'" But Josh's style is as boisterous as it is pragmatic. "I always go big. Blood continuity is the bane of my set life. DUMP IT!"

Their unique brains all came together as a single unit on the aforementioned hanging sequence. In one of the standout moments of the movie, a character is hanged by an ethereal rope that tightens and tightens until her head is popped clean off of her body. "When Anthony dropped on us that the way he wanted the movement – one large, immediate dump of blood and not a spray or pour – the simplest solution with what we had on hand was a large trash bag filled with blood, bunching up the bottom and quickly slicing it to release the blood all at once,"

"The only way to blow off a head with a shotgun is to blow it off with a shotgun. Everything else looks fake."
- Josh Russell

Sierra reveals. "It's the little things in life that bring me joy. For this movie, no blood is too much."

One of the most exciting new additions to DiBlasi's reboot is the invention of The Temple Baron, a haloed interdimensional creature who sort of functions as the movie's "boss monster." It's a wild figure design, a combination of flayed skin and regal robes that would make Barker himself proud. "Figuring out how to have a removable halo and also making a halo that wouldn't put too much weight on the actor's head, but have strength to hold, took some ingenuity. We have great artists that come and work for Russell FX. Damien Zimmerman is usually our key painter, but over the years he's shown some real gumption and took a great lead in breaking down some of the design builds. One artist reference that was put in the lookbook for The Baron was coincidentally a friend of Damien, Missy Stell, who started the base costume for us and made a wonderfully grotesque chest piece, as well. The discussion of The Temple Baron's look being surreal and dark royalty was fun to create. Many layers went into that character."

In the end, all parties were overjoyed with the results of their endeavors. "We are always excited to do what we do!" says Sierra. "When there is more love and attention put toward effects and creature making, we're like kids in a candy store." DiBlasi's thrilled with the final result. "There's the effects that you want to look at, and there's the effects that you don't want to look at. It's like, okay, do I want people to turn away from this a little bit, or do I want people to really relish in this? For a movie like this, I mainly want them to relish in it. You want to make people see it before they turn away. You want to make them regret they saw it."

He continues, "I was really blown away by it. It's way better, but still emulates the first movie. We weren't expecting that."

Gore fanatics get excited. Anthony DiBlasi is a filmmaker who knows what he wants, and he enlists top-notch artists like Russell FX to execute that wicked vision.

"Just scare me!" DiBlasi shouts. "Just pour some blood and scare me – I want to be scared!"

MALUM (CHANEY MORROW) ASCENDS THE THRONE.

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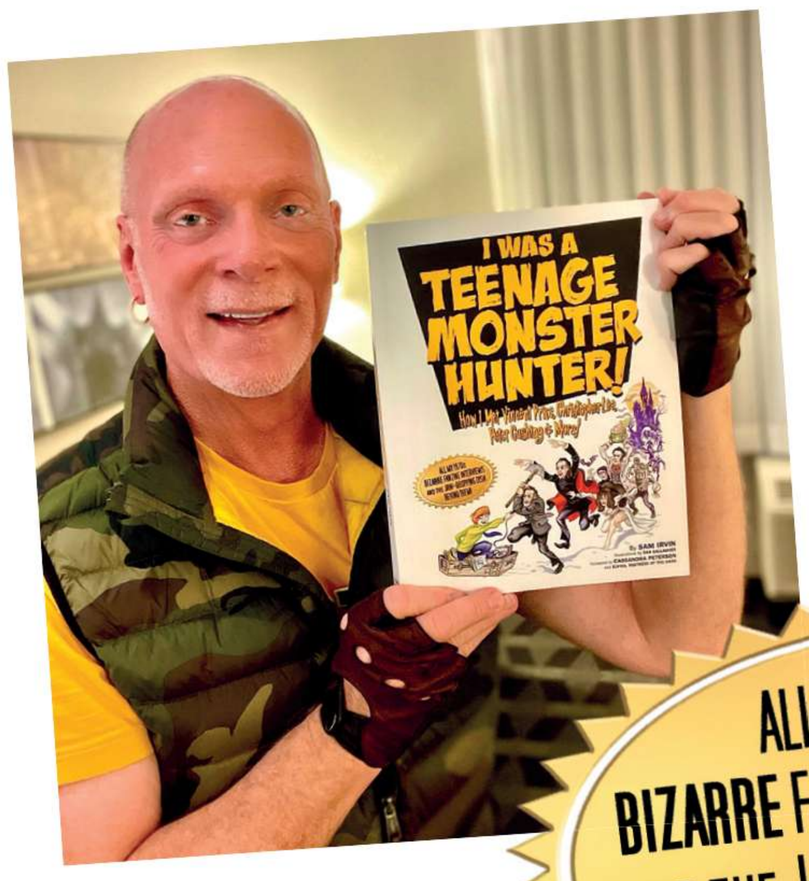
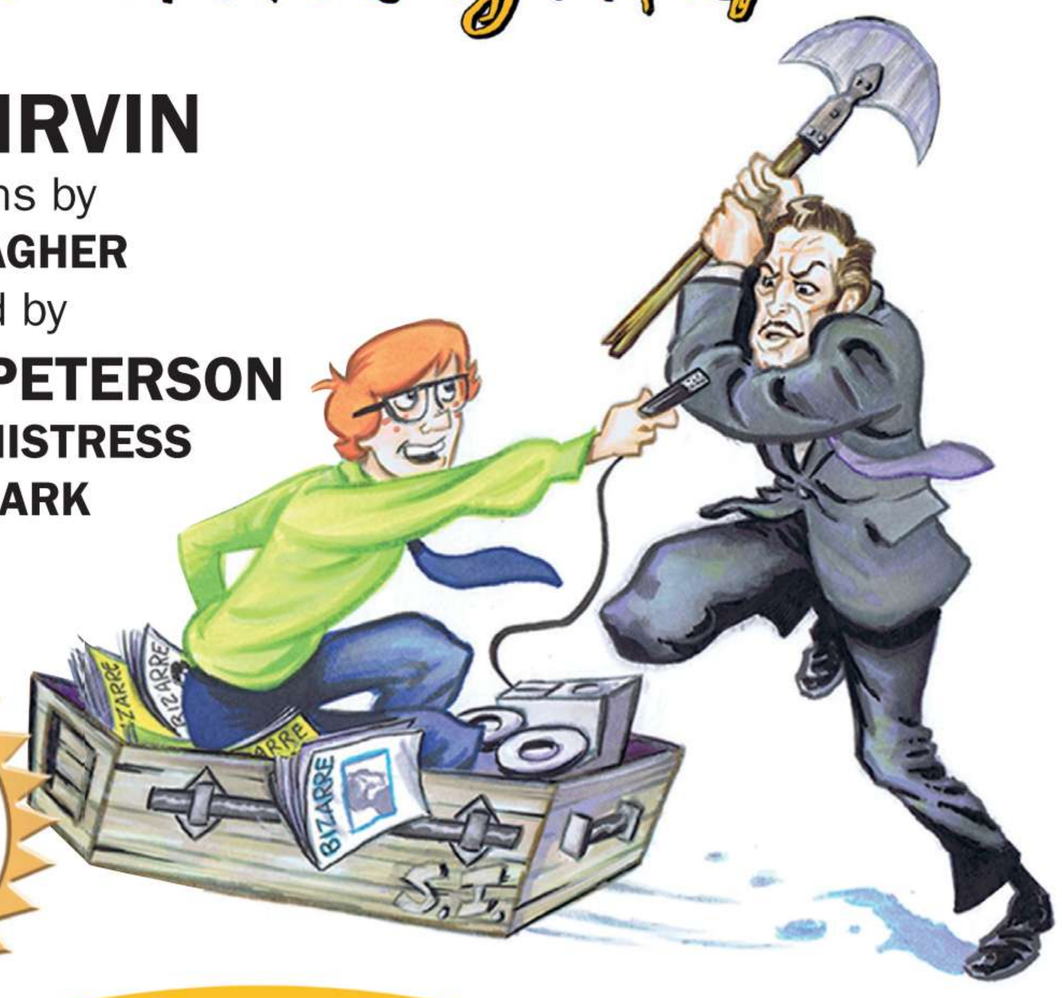


By **SAM IRVIN**
Illustrations by
DAN GALLAGHER
Foreword by
CASSANDRA PETERSON
aka **ELVIRA, MISTRESS OF THE DARK**



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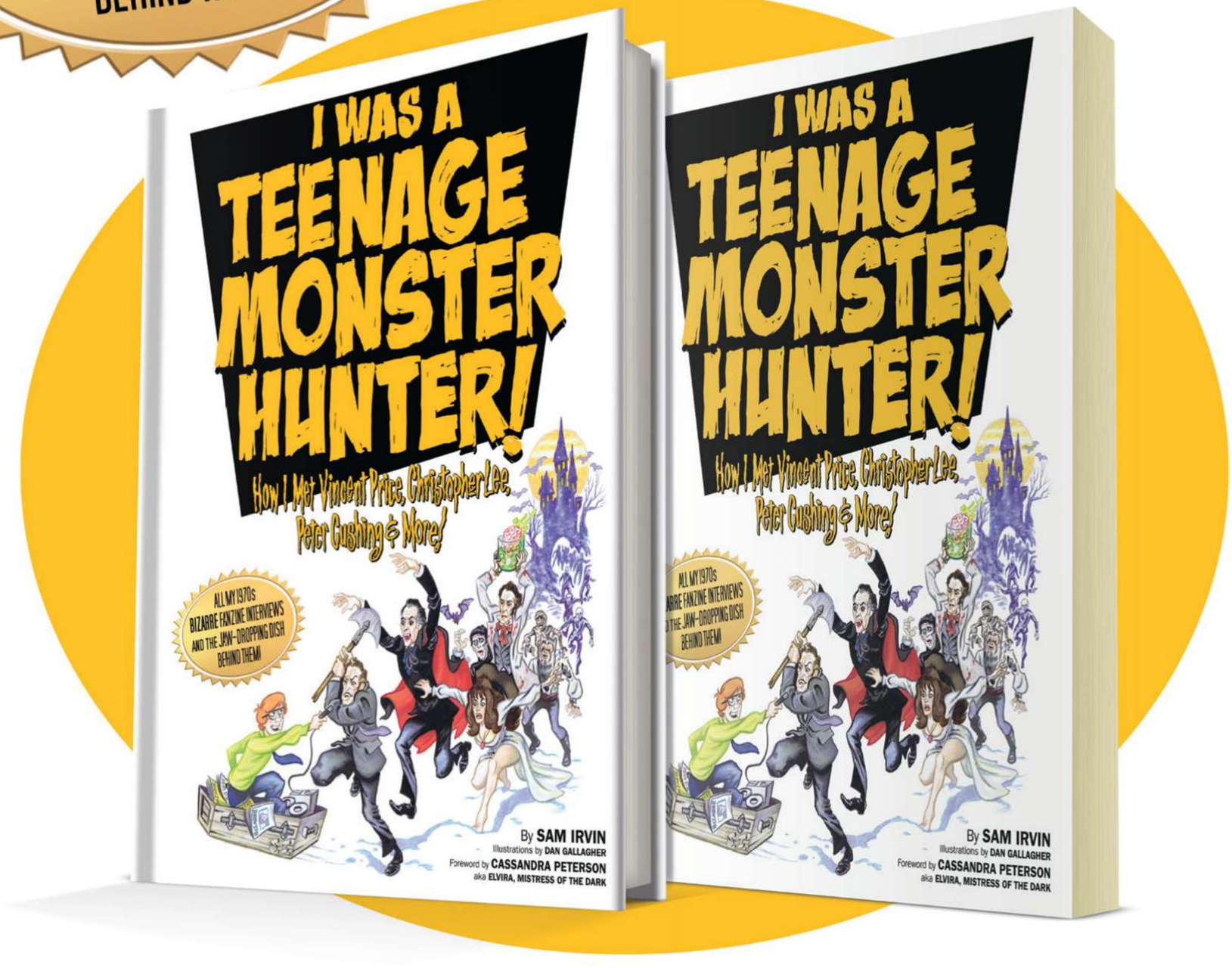
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LIVING WITH THE NEW FLESH

By Brittany Knupper

The films of David Cronenberg are a surprising source of comfort for a writer navigating a rare illness.

My hand was exploding. I was standing in the shower, staring at the fountain of pus erupting from my palm like a pea soup Vesuvius. It poured out in an unending torrent, a geyser of murky, cream-colored filth. A stream of sickly detritus gushed forth, coating my wrist and forearm, flooding the floor of the shower before circling down the drain.

So much for trying to open that bottle of shampoo.

I had only been out of the hospital for two days when a slight tap of a plastic bottle burst my hand open like a rotten melon. I have a rare form of cancer called Mycosis Fungoides, and when a new tumor rapidly took over my hand and caused it to swell, resembling Mickey Mouse's cartoon glove, I was rushed to the hospital for a week of inpatient emergency radiation.

The radiation worked; the tumor was liquified. Unfortunately, it also became trapped and formed the abscess that had popped all over my unsuspecting, naked self.

In that moment, my mind kept going back to *The Fly*, David Cronenberg's 1986 horror masterpiece about the devastating effects of a scientist's hubris – and not just because the muck he vomits onto his food is an eerie parallel to what came out of my hand. As Seth Brundle's (Jeff Goldblum) body begins to transform into a human/fly monstrosity, his girlfriend (Geena Davis) recoils.

Watching him try to adapt to his new way of being is too much for her. The stench and the filth, the trash-ridden apartment. His mental changes and mood swings. The myth that his body was ever under his control has evaporated.

But we see the fear most in Veronica.

Brundle has reached a state of acceptance for his fate that Veronica cannot. And so it is her fear of his evolution that we track as the film progresses. Her fear for him becomes a fear of him. We witness her nightmare of birthing a maggot when she discovers that she is pregnant. And even the final climactic scenes in which Brundlefly tries to take his girlfriend into the machine with him and fuse them together telegraphs Veronica's fear of becoming sick like him. It is the dark, forbidden fear of the caregiver.

My body, like Seth Brundle's, has been going through some changes. And so I can't help but relate to the monster. When I was first diagnosed, my skin, like Brundle's, was the initial signifier that something was wrong. My entire body was covered in thick, angry plaques. Even my first treatment, UVB phototherapy, took place in a machine that looked unnervingly like Brundle's telepods. I know the pain of seeing loved ones recoil at my visage, concerned for me, but also afraid to touch me. I have even felt the anguish and heartbreak of a partner ending our relationship because living with a chronically ill person was no longer fun for him. I have seen the disgust and pity in Veronica's big brown eyes reflected back at me more times than I wish to count.

But despite all of this, I understand Brundle's acceptance. One tiny oversight he has no control over, just a fly in the telepod, triggers permanent and disabling repercussions of his mind and body. Cancer is like that. I never smoked; I was a robust and healthy person, but it still got me. I have been in constant treatment for the past six years, moving from phototherapy to clinical trials to immunotherapy to chemo and radiation. And all I can do is learn to live in my new reality. On the outside, I might look like the Brundlefly, lumpy and grotesque, but on the inside, I am strangely at peace.

Considering my emotional state as both a woman and a chronically ill patient, I'm also reminded of Cronenberg's 1979 divorce-horror classic *The Brood*. Initially inspired by the turmoil of his own nasty divorce, The Brood tells the story of Nola and Frank Carveth (Samantha Eggar and Art Hindle), a couple locked in a bitter custody dispute over their daughter Candice (Cindy Hinds). Nola has become so unwell that she is currently an inpatient at Hal Raglan's (Oliver Reed) "Somafree Institute of Psychoplasmics," an experimental treatment center where patients are encouraged to process their traumas through physiological changes to their bodies. Over the course of the film, we watch as small demonic children attack and maim anyone who is a threat to Nola. Both of her parents are murdered – her father for physically abusing her as a child, and her mother for ignoring the abuse. Even a potential new love interest for Frank is attacked because she might pose as a replacement for Nola.

In the disturbing finale, it is revealed that these demonic children were in fact birthed by Nola herself via large external tumors that extend outwards from her stomach. They are the physical manifestation of all of her unheard rage, of decades of repressed trauma.

And while you can certainly read some minor notes of misogyny in this tale of a man trying to protect his child from the "insane" mother, I find Nola to be deeply empathetic. Studies have shown that women's pain is often dismissed if not downright disbelieved. And as a chronically ill cancer patient, I spent an entire decade of my life trying to get my mysterious illness diagnosed and taken seriously. I know the burning rage that boils in the stomach of every woman who is told they must be overreacting or just wanting attention. I know how it feels to be in plain sight with my body covered in thick, scaly patches (like childhood Nola with her bruises), while nothing is done about it.

And of course, there are Nola's tumors. My first tumor appeared on my shoulder in 2016 and quickly grew to the size of a small orange. And it was that tumor that finally got me the diagnosis I had been hunting for. I at last exhibited something severe enough to be taken seriously. But it was in 2020 that my tumors began again in earnest. The ticking time bomb of my giant hand tumor marked the next phase in my transformation. After the emergency radiation, an abscess explosion, and the excruciating healing process, my back and stomach took over tumor production. Over the next two years I was in and out of radiation as tumors would immediately spring up almost as soon as my last radiation was complete. I was the inverse-Nola, attempting to abort my emotional and physical burdens, but always, always creating more.

I most recently find myself relating to Cronenberg's 2022 cinematic return, *Crimes of the Future*.

Set in a filthy dystopia where mankind has evolved to be immune to bacteria and infections, certain humans are evolving. They are developing strange tumors, and some have discovered that they have evolved to consume microplastics. Most of humanity views these new humans as vile mutants, not the future of a humankind living on a polluted planet. Some, like performance artist Saul Tenser (Viggo Mortensen), refuse to accept this change within themselves and instead turn their insides into art. Saul could keep his new organs and eat plastic in comfort, but instead he embraces his pain, putting it all on display for a ravenous audience.

I often struggle with this concept as a writer. In a world obsessed with "the authentic story" and trauma narratives, is it actually healthy for me to carve up the most personal and painful parts of myself and offer them up for public consumption? Am I making myself miserable for my art? Would my life be easier if I didn't crave an audience telling me that my work (in other words, my pain and suffering) was important and meaningful? Could I just be content with my little microplastic candy bars?

But unfortunately, much like Saul, I do find importance in offering up my gory viscera to the public. I could claim that I only want to share my story in the hopes that someone else will read it and recognize the symptoms I describe and get the diagnosis they have been searching for. And that has happened, and it does make writing about my experience one thousand percent worthwhile. But that wouldn't be the whole truth. I also do it because, like all people, I want to be seen. I want an audience to gaze upon my new flesh and be enthralled.

I am Saul Tenser, but I am also Nicki Brand (Debbie Harry) of *Videodrome*, the masochist who can't wait to sacrifice herself, and I want my audience to watch this screen and feel compelled. I want them to change as I have been changed. It might be shameful to admit, but all writers want an audience that evolves because of their work, that mutates despite themselves, that would grow penis hands for them, that might recognize the monster within themselves.

We all long to be perceived for who we really are – not just perceived, but celebrated. And that is one thing all of Cronenberg's monsters have in common. Brundle, Nola, even Saul – they are not ashamed of who they are, who they become. Brundle revels in his change, so much so that he wants to pass it on to others. Nola defiantly and proudly lifts the petals of her dress to reveal her tumors to Frank, daring him to speak. Saul literally opens up his guts before a live audience.

And then there's me. Because I, too, am one of Cronenberg's monsters. And I just want to be seen. 💀

MAKEUP MASTER BILL CORSO Spills the Latex

In her continuing series, the Legends Makeup Academy co-founder talks to other notables in the industry she helped pioneer.

By Ve Neill

I'd like to start by saying how proud I am of this gentleman – I almost said "young man," but he's not anymore, and I tend to forget that because I have known Bill Corso for about 35 years.

Let's begin with the dozens of nominations and wins he has amassed over that time. He won the Oscar in 2005 for *Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events*; he was nominated in 2007 for *Click* and again in 2015 for *Foxcatcher*. Bill has won three Emmys, including for Stephen King's *The Shining* and *The Stand*, and he's earned five Saturn Award nominations and five Guild Award nominations. He holds an esteemed position as one of the Governors for the Makeup Artist and Hairstylist Branch of the Motion Picture Academy, as well as for the Science and Technology Council of the Academy.

He got started in the business with a bang, working on a film starring Burt Reynolds right out of Joe Blasco's makeup school when he was just 18 years old. His first screen credit was on *The Garbage Pail Kids*, then worked on *The Blob* remake and *Slumber Party Massacre 2*. He says he got a reputation as a bit of "an obnoxious know-it-all," but that didn't stop him from being hired at 21 years old to work on *Gremlins 2* with the great Rick Baker!

Okay, now that I'm done gushing about him, let's let him weigh in. I'm out of breath!

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BILL CORSO

How did you come to work with [XFX founder] Steve Johnson?

After I left Rick's, I had the opportunity to design all the makeup and creature FX for *The Boneyard*, which my friend James [Cummins] had written and was directing. My crew and I got to make some really cool puppets and stuff that actually got in FANGORIA, a dream come true. I made a 12-foot tall killer poodle, a 12-foot tall Phyllis Diller monster and three little, ancient Chinese ghouls, not to mention tons of FX makeup gags. I took one of the ghoul puppets with me when I went in for an interview for a commercial with Steve Johnson, and I wound up staying at XFX for eight years.

What was the craziest movie you did with Steve?

They were all crazy. He was such a genius and would always want to tear things apart at the last minute and redo them. No matter how well I thought I did something, he would always find a way to make it better. He had a great eye. Just look at *Fright Night* and *Ghostbusters*. Steve was a genius. My best achievement while at Steve's was the film *Freaked*. I was left to art direct and supervise the build while he was off shooting on the film *Innocent Blood*. I was also head makeup artist on set.

I remember I went to visit the shop one day and there were these crazy-looking monster things made out of garbage bags. He made shit out of garbage bags! Bill Bryan, who also played the Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man [in *Ghostbusters*] helped Steve figure all that out. One example was the cocoon the girl alien emerges out of in the film *Species*. We painted this giant, tentacled cocoon with pulsing bits, and then slimed it all up and pushed a naked girl out of it. I've had worse jobs, let me tell you.

What are the most challenging projects you've worked on and in what capacity?

Amistad, without a doubt. The subject matter was disturbing, and Steven Spielberg was yelling at me that I was ruining the movie daily because I was touching actors up. I learned the hard way that Steven didn't like actors being touched up once they were on set, as opposed to the customary 'last looks' that usually occur. That helped me to became more of a professional. It taught me what to focus on, and what matters.

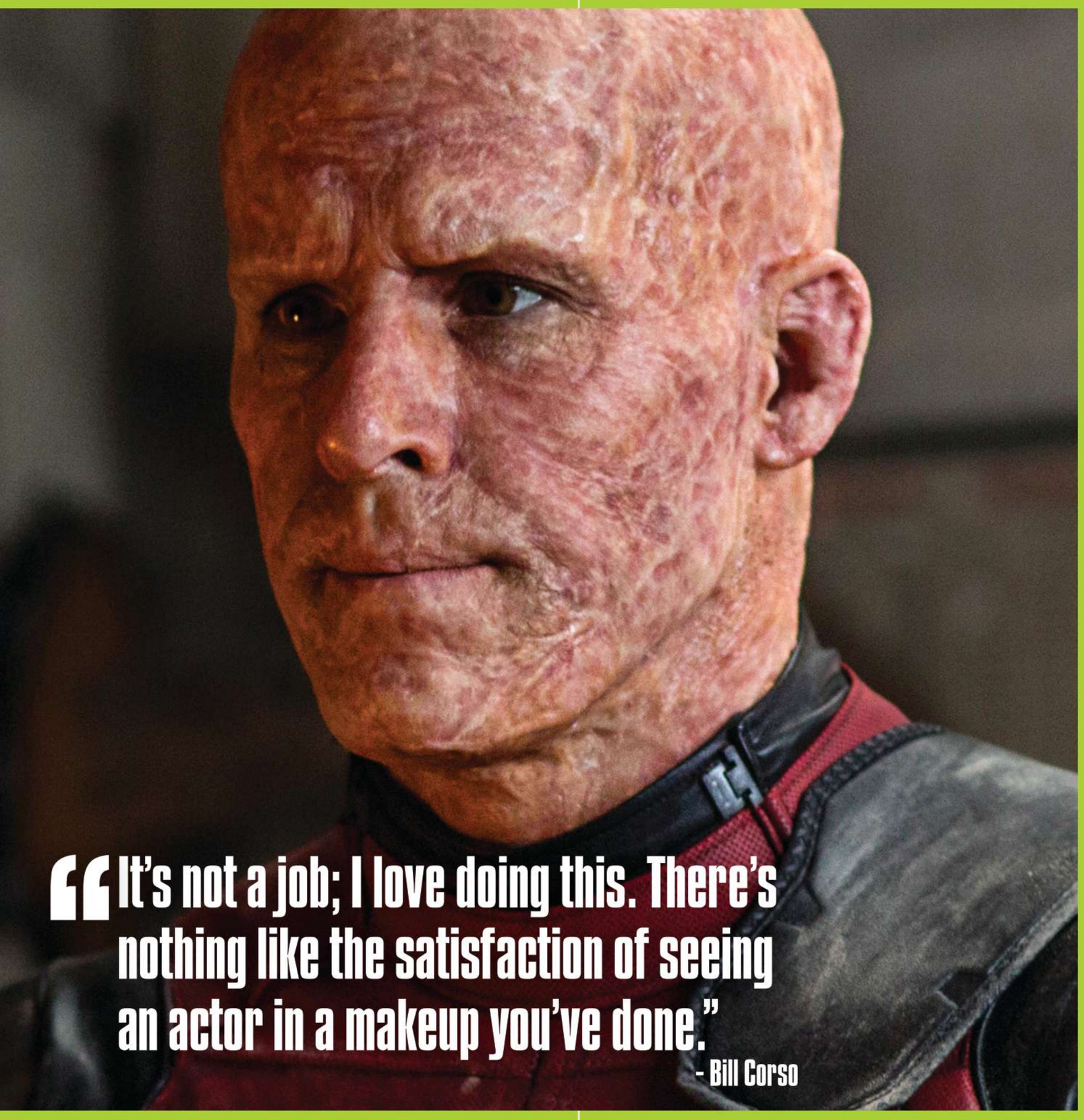
As for prosthetics and artistically, *Foxcatcher* was the most challenging. Turning Steve Carell into an unrecognizable, blue-blooded New Englander, who would be scrutinized in great detail, was nerve-wracking and very stressful, but ultimately rewarding.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT (THIS PAGE AND FACING): BRINGING DEADPOOL (RYAN REYNOLDS) TO LIFE; *THE SHINING* (1997); *SLUMBER PARTY MASSACRE II*; *THE HOWLING 6*; TWO DENIZENS OF *THE BONEYARD*.

What were some of the most fun projects?

Easiest fun – *Indiana Jones* or *Star Wars*, as my client Mr. [Harrison] Ford is very low-maintenance, so I didn't have a lot of heavy lifting to do. Dream job.

Creatively – I would say *Deadpool*. I just happened upon the job because Blake Lively referred me to her husband [Ryan Reynolds]. He was fun, the job was fun, and so was everyone else on the production.



Tell me how you got started on that project.

Well, first we had to come up with [Deadpool's] look. The description in the script was, 'He is so repulsive he has to wear a mask because he looks look like a testicle with teeth.' Good start!

There are tons of comic book references, which is great, of course. The first thing I did was to start designing looks on Ryan digitally in Photoshop. I didn't want it to look like Freddy Krueger, but funny enough in some of the comic books he does look just like him. He's been drawn looking like everything from a face with squiggly lines on it to literally a rotting corpse. In our movie he had to be kissable. He has a romance with this girl, but he still has to look like a testicle with teeth. It isn't a burn makeup; he's mutated. He's dying of cancer so he goes through this procedure to save his life, which it does, but also has the side effects of causing him to look horribly disfigured but have a healing factor that makes him unkillable.

All the photoshop pics I did looked like scars, which I didn't want, so we needed to do some practical makeup tests. My friend, Andrew Clement, and his studio Creative Character Engineering helped me with the lab work, and Andy and I each did three different makeup tests. We did photo shoots and video on all six makeups. Some looked exactly like the comic books. I did one where you could see through the skin and see muscles underneath. I Photoshopped on top of them and put him in a Deadpool suit and sent them off to the director [Tim Miller] and to Ryan. They picked the ones they liked and then Ryan came in so we could do a practical test. When we were doing the camera test the studio was so afraid that he was going to look so disgusting that they thought, 'Well, maybe he should have hair.' We tried to tell them how wrong that would be, but we reluctantly added some hair and eyebrows, and I even put on a nose ring so he kind of looked like a pirate. Then we took all of that off and then we did the really horrific version of the makeup, the version we wanted it to look like. Obviously, the worst he would ever look. We loved that version, of course.

How many prosthetic pieces did you use to create the final look?

Whenever you saw Ryan's face, you also saw his arms. There were a total of twenty pieces, eight on his head and six pieces on each his arms. On those days there were three people getting him into makeups and, on the full body day, there were four makeup artists on him and on his double. On the first film my main artists were Mike Fields, Geoff Redknap and Celine Godeau. On the first movie it took three hours and 45 minutes to get him in to makeup. He only wore it maybe a third of the movie. On *Deadpool 2*, it was like 50/50, so Ryan asked to figure out a way to make it faster. I completely reengineered how it went on. I saw what wasn't needed and was able to reconfigure how to break it down to make application faster. Most people aren't aware that the hardest part about that makeup is he has a full beard and head of hair underneath all that. So my idea of the appliances being paper thin and translucent was more trouble than it was worth. I basically shot myself in the foot with that. We had to glue the beard down and then I had skin-colored transfers that went over the beard to cover it up. He also wore a bald cap that I painted all mottled and creepy, and I accented the skull to enhance his bone structure, which we would see through the skin.

Then there was the full-on naked fight sequence. That took seven hours of application on him and the double. We constructed a partial suit built on a body stocking that consisted of chest, back, legs and arms which cut down the time considerably. This was applied to a body double to use later on Ryan.

We also had to blend the feet and the hands. This process was also done on his stunt double the same day.

On the second movie, we didn't have any more naked Deadpool scenes, and he [had] shaved his beard and hair down much shorter. We got the makeup down to just under two hours with four of us working on him at once. Everything was pre-painted by Bronwyne Sloley about 90%, and then I would finish it. At this point it was basically done, but the last pass of color was my favorite. I would cover it with bright yellow, bruise red and blue Premiere Products Glazing Gels, and then I would do a full polish like a Basil Gogos painting so all the colors and shapes would pop. Then we sealed the heck out of it with Op-site spray.

That's what tied it all together and really made it sing for me. That was something I learned from Steve Johnson, because all his paint jobs were so over the top. They all popped big. He said, 'Never paint anything uniform. Do blocks of color, like real skin has.'

So you have done around 105 productions since you started in 1986 in some capacity or another. That's 37 years. Where do you see yourself in ten years?

Still going to be doing this. It's not a job; I love doing this. There's nothing like the satisfaction of seeing an actor in a makeup you've done, and now I can pick and choose fun, artistically cool films to work on.

How did you start Digital Makeup Group and why?

A few years ago, my actors kept asking if I was involved at all with the digital post work being done on them, and then directors started asking. My dear friend and brilliant makeup artist Julie Hewitt put the bug in my ear to start investigating how to get it going. She said, 'Stop complaining and do something about it. It's going to take someone like you, who understands and appreciates both crafts to bring them together and make it better.' I started investigating and looked around until I found the right people, and then start talking to filmmakers. One of the first films we did was *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, because

CORSO TOUCHES UP THE MERC WITH A MOUTH.

we had actors that needed to have work done. I chatted with [executive producer] Kathleen Kennedy and said, 'Do you want somebody touching up our actors in post who doesn't know what they should be doing, or someone like me who knows exactly what needs to be done?'

You just want it to look like great makeup and not a fuzzy, digital fix. That kind of work should always be invisible. You don't want anybody to know anything was done. So it only makes sense for makeup artists to help art direct it. As great as the digital artists are, their forte is not looking at people's faces all day like a makeup artist does. Our job is faces – that's what we do, and nobody does it better. 💀

This conversation was edited for length and clarity.

A DUST-UP (OF SORTS) WITH HARRISON FORD ON *INDIANA JONES AND THE KINGDOM OF THE CRYSTAL SKULL.*

THIS IS HIS DESIGN:

BRYAN FULLER AND CAST TALK HANNIBAL

Ten years after HANNIBAL changed network television forever, we hear from the brains behind the banquet.

SOUP'S ON. FOR THREE SEASONS, MADS MIKKELSEN'S HANNIBAL LECTER PREPARED AND SERVED THE HAUTEST OF CUISINES… AND OK, OCCASIONALLY HIS GUEST (HUGH DANCY AS WILL GRAHAM) WAS THE GRUB.

BY **SAMANTHA MCLAREN**

HORS D'OEUVRES

There's a moment in *Scream 4* when Hayden Panettiere's Kirby Reed reels off fifteen recent remakes of classic horror movies. It's a rapid-fire commentary on the state of the horror landscape in 2011, the same year that *Hannibal* went into development at NBC before being released two years later. It's also a good indication of what the series might have been with a less ambitious creator: just another footnote in the remake boom of the new millennium.

Bryan Fuller was never worried. As a fan of Thomas Harris' *Red Dragon*, the novel that introduced Hannibal Lecter to the world, he felt that previous adaptations had barely scratched the surface of the relationship between the cannibalistic serial killer and the man who caught him, Will Graham. Fuller wasn't reheating old leftovers so much as reading between the lines of the cookbook.

"There's this whole history and suggestion of intimacy that went beyond anything that was in any of the adaptations," he says of the novel. "It also planted a lot of seeds in the text that had yet to be sown, whether that was in the literature or on screen."

The true depths of Graham's character weren't wholly plumbed onscreen before *Hannibal*. Graham has "pure empathy," meaning he can get into the mind of anyone, including murderers, and that scares him.

"There wasn't the real estate to fully explore what it would be like to have the kind of mind that could imagine all of these things and still be within reach of some semblance of morality," Fuller says of 1986's *Manhunter* and 2002's *Red Dragon*. "That felt relatively untapped in the movies because they're very procedural in the way they tackled the material. But Thomas Harris' prose is so lurid and suggestive and poetic. Whenever I have adapted anything, I've always wanted to give the audience the feeling that I had reading those words."

Initially, Fuller considered *Heroes* star Zachary Quinto for the role of Will Graham. "Zach and I had talked for a while about it, and Zach ultimately chose not to pursue. And then Hugh Dancy's name came up and everybody just blinked and said 'of course' without a second thought because he's a compelling actor. He invites you into his experience."

"I was interested in the idea of this person who is empathetic to a fault," Dancy says of the role. "That's the thing about Will that makes him vulnerable to Hannibal in a sense. But it's also what makes him safe from Hannibal – to the extent that he is safe from Hannibal – because it's what fascinates Hannibal about him."

Mads Mikkelsen, who became the fourth actor to portray Lecter and whose performance in *Hannibal* went on to typify the role for many viewers, agrees.

"Will is a man with a ton of diagnoses. For Hannibal, that's being in a candy store. This is what he thrives on."

SHOWRUNNER BRYAN FULLER WAS SERIOUS ABOUT BRINGING AUTHOR THOMAS HARRIS' WORDS TO THE SCREEN, BUT THAT DIDN'T STOP HIM FROM HAVING FUN ON SET WITH HIS MURDER HUSBANDS (DANCY AND MIKKELSEN).

> "The attempt was to transcend the real qualities of the crimes and take them into something so heightened that they didn't really resemble what was happening in real life." - Bryan Fuller

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRYAN FULLER

PLAT PRINCIPAL

In the 1980s, David Lynch was attached to direct the first-ever adaptation of *Red Dragon*. That adaptation never materialized; Lynch became disillusioned with the project, stating in an interview with David Breskin that making the film would have meant "going into a world that was going to be, for [him], real, real violent and completely degenerate."

For Fuller, who cites Lynch as an influence, this was also a concern. He was confident about the pilot, but as the team got deeper into scripting the first season, he kept finding gristle in the meat. *Hannibal* felt too much like a standard police procedural, and while he saw that as a "necessary evil" to sneak it onto NBC, he knew this story had the potential to be more. Part of the problem was the realism inherent to the genre, something that Fuller ultimately rejected, scrapping several scripts in the process.

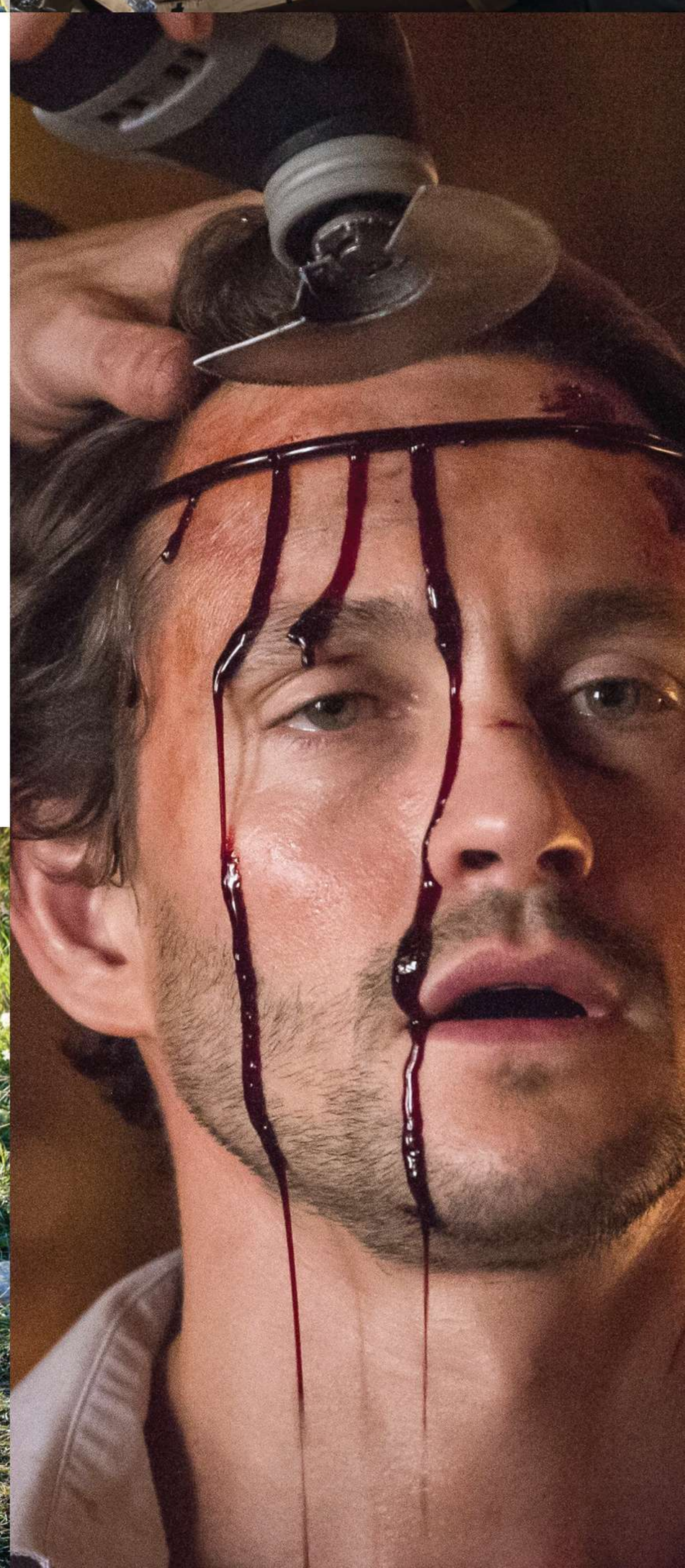
"The attempt was to transcend the real qualities of the crimes and take them into something so heightened that they didn't really resemble what was happening in real life," he says. "I think that, if anything, was the fallacy of the first scripts that we abandoned: they were all too close to real life in a way that wasn't as much fun. So we will plant a human tree or grow mushrooms on comatose people buried in the ground because those types of things feel less exploitative and more fantastical."

FULLER STILL MARVELS TODAY AT ALL OF THE "CREATIVE KILLERS IN BALTIMORE" – FRANKLY, WE'RE NOT SURE WHAT HE'S REFERRING TO.

Aaron Abrams, who portrayed crime scene investigator Brian Zeller, has guest-starred on plenty of procedurals over the years, but it was immediately clear that something about this one was different.

"There was certainly a feeling, especially after I met Bryan, that the show would never be the expected – that it would grow and morph and evolve as it went," he says. "Although I had no idea where it was necessarily going to go, I did get a sense that Bryan was always going to not just push the boundaries of genre, but bend them and transform them into something new and surprising. And insane."

Mikkelsen, on the other hand, had a good sense of how weird the series would get.



POOR ABIGAIL HOBBS (KACEY ROHL) REALLY GOT THE SHAFT IN THE DAD DEPARTMENT, WHETHER BIOLOGICAL OR SURROGATE (MIKKELSEN).

“I was supposed to spend half an hour with Bryan as he was pitching me the story for the first season – and after three or four hours, he was in season eight and had so many crazy ideas,” the actor recalls with a chuckle. “He’s quite unique, Bryan. I anticipated and was crossing my fingers that that would come across on screen. And I wasn’t disappointed at all.”

What made it to the screen was some of the most shocking and surreal imagery ever to have appeared on network TV when the series first aired in 2013. The cast remember it vividly.

“There are several set pieces that have stayed with me,” says Laurence Fishburne, who played FBI Special Agent Jack Crawford, the man whose decision to borrow Graham’s imagination led to unimaginable consequences. “The most incredible set piece was the human eye composed of naked bodies. It’s one of the most beautiful images ever.”

“Some of the things we were playing with were very cable-y, and so to be able to kind of sneak those on NBC where our lead-in was, I think, *Parks and Rec* was pretty cool,” says Kacey Rohl, who was cast as Lecter and Graham’s shared surrogate daughter, Abigail Hobbs. “There were many, many, many, many scenes I’m surprised made it on air, but the one that I keep circling back to is that I bled out on the alter of a church!”

“The most jarring was when real human beings were used,” Abrams says. “The lobotomized folks with beehives for brains walking around with honey dripping out of their eyes and mouths are a real nightmare-maker.”

“Certainly, there were a *lot* of creative killers in Baltimore!” Fuller laughs. “But it really was all about the fantastic crime scene, and I think that goes back to my childhood, seeing things like *Salem’s Lot* and the [impalement] on the antlers, or pictures in FANGORIA of these outlandish killings. There was always a completely independent cinematic quality to the crime scenes. Looking at them felt like art.”

As Mikkelsen puts it, *Hannibal* is “almost like a painting” – and Lecter’s own artistry was on full display in the kitchen.

“Hannibal was very much an artist and his dinner table was a canvas,” says *Hannibal* food stylist Janice Poon. “On his plates, I was able to show this wild liminal space where fantasy and reality exist together: butterflies on foie gras; lobsters hatching from melons; squid emerging from snail shells… Always pushing reality almost to breaking point. This is why my food had to look irresistibly delicious, so that the appetite overcame any fear that the uncanny may have prompted.”

Each crime scene in *Hannibal* is a portrait painted in blood, observed through the lens of a man who feels the phantom sensation of the paintbrush in his hands. Dancy, an actor who was not known for horror before the series, relished the opportunity to get his hands bloody as he stepped into the various killers’ shoes.

“It’s really joyful, weirdly,” he says. “It’s as close as you can get to being a kid play-acting with your little costume box – but with an entire crew of people to cover you in blood. I loved it. I got covered in enough blood to last eight careers.”

THIS IS FIVE YEARS BEFORE *MIDSOMMAR*, MIND YOU.

MIGNARDISE

Hannibal might have been served in an era of largely forgotten remakes, but its own flavor has not diminished over the years, continuing to infuse the media that came after.

"Like Chianti, it gets better with age," says Lara Jean Chorostecki, who portrayed *Hannibal*'s intrepid crime reporter Freddie Lounds. "It was unlike anything on network TV at the time, and spoke to a future trajectory… that takes more creative chances."

"I think it expanded the palette of what folks working on network can get away with now," Rohl agrees. "Magic realism, and especially as much of it as we were kicking around, was kind of unheard of on network before *Hannibal*."

For Fuller's part, he "would be very flattered if anybody suggested *Hannibal* had an influence" on other television that has come after.

"Mostly, I'm proud that *Hannibal* has had an influence on people's lives to find community as outsiders," he says. "For a lot of people who've responded to the show or have seen themselves in some small part of the characters, it's not that they identify with fermenting people in barrels of beer to drink and serve as much as it is 'I, too, feel a palpable loneliness even when I'm in a group of people because I don't think they could truly understand me.' I think both Will and Hannibal have felt in their lives that they are impossible to understand."

He's not the only one who has felt the impact that the series has had on fans – and vice versa.

"The series' lasting legacy still lies with its fans, the Fannibals," Chorostecki says. "What a beautiful group of passionate, creative, and kind individuals. They, over anyone else, have kept the series alive."

"I meet a lot of people who are just the biggest fans of the show," Fishburne says. "That has been very gratifying, knowing that you did a piece of work that people really enjoyed."

"It's the only thing I've been involved in that's bigger now and has this separate life that's entirely different, almost, to what it was when we first made it," Dancy reflects. "There's a community surrounding it. I don't feel detached from that, but I no longer feel like I have ownership of it. And that's quite an unusual feeling, one that I really love."

FULLER AND THE FELINE: THE SHOWRUNNER BROUGHT THE *RED DRAGON* STORY TO THE SERIES IN SEASON THREE.

Mikkelsen, who has gone on to star in major franchise films like *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* and the upcoming *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny*, describes the fan community as "quite special" and says he "cherished" the three years he got to spend with the cast and crew on *Hannibal*. He still looks back on playing Lecter fondly, calling him an "amazingly interesting character."

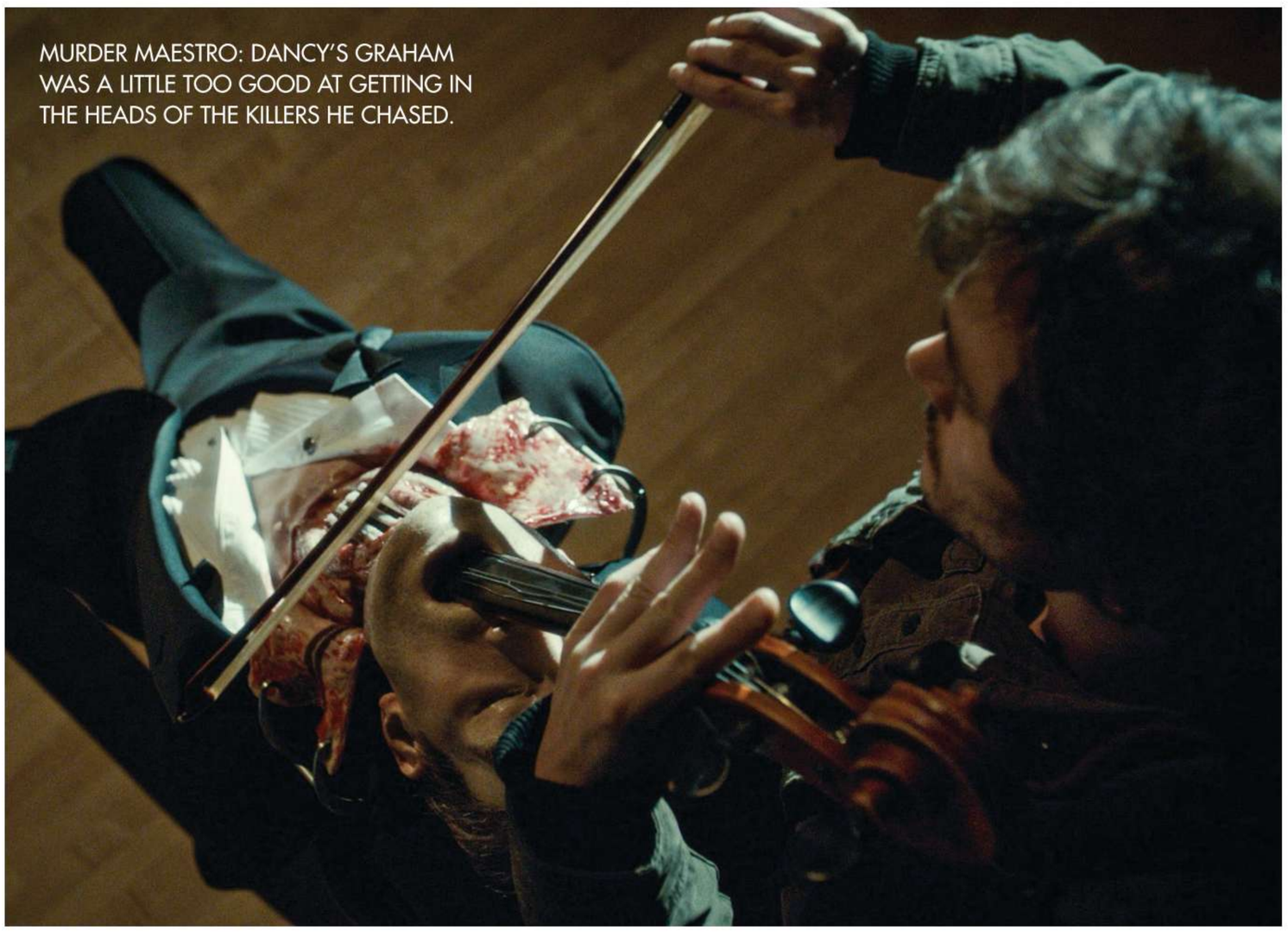
"When you do a TV show, more often than not, the character will be the solid point of the story – it doesn't change too much, it's the anchor," Mikkelsen says. "Hannibal kept changing. He kept evolving."

Fishburne, meanwhile, remains pleased to have played the only character in Lecter lore to have thoroughly kicked the cannibal's ass. "Jack Crawford is THE MAN," he says.

As for a possible fourth season – one where, perhaps, Lecter and Graham would escape to Cuba, as Fuller has teased, with Crawford hot on their heels – the time for speculation has passed. It will happen one day, or it won't. Poon is keeping the oven warm, just in case.

"I dreamt of dinner evocative of Santería-Voodoo animal sacrifice, garlanded with over-ripe fruits, redolent of tropical breezes and Old Spice, and consumed by the fire of sparking logs on a beach beneath a starry sky," she envisions of Season Four's flavors. "Or fresh-caught lunch, eaten lazily, in a little painted boat floating on a turquoise sea after diving for sea urchins, octopi, and frenemies gone overboard."

Delicious. 💀



MURDER MAESTRO: DANCY'S GRAHAM WAS A LITTLE TOO GOOD AT GETTING IN THE HEADS OF THE KILLERS HE CHASED.

NINETEEN96

WHS

Yellowjackets

Wiskayok High School

Brr…it's cold in here! There must be some 'Jackets in the atmosphere! Our champions (plus Misty) are gearing up to blow minds, burn bridges, and break bonds with reality this season.

Yellowjackets SEASON 2

Buzz buzz, WHS class of '96! We asked the 2 good 2B 4gotten showrunner team of Ashley Lyle & Bart Nickerson to come up with some superlatives for our YELLOWJACKETS sophomore season class. So dive in and get the 411 — there's hella scoop in here for anyone ready to dig!

Stay sweet, have an awesome summer and LYLAS — Meredith Borders

STANDOUTS

Akilah

Most Likely To Talk To Animals

Your girl's finally moving up to varsity this year! — A

Mari

Most Likely To Contact You On Facebook 20 Years After Graduation To Sell You Something

BULLY

Travis Martinez

Most Likely To Mess Things Up
With His Crush

Lottie Matthews

Most Likely To Accidentally Start A Cult

DUH!

Vanessa "Van" Palmer

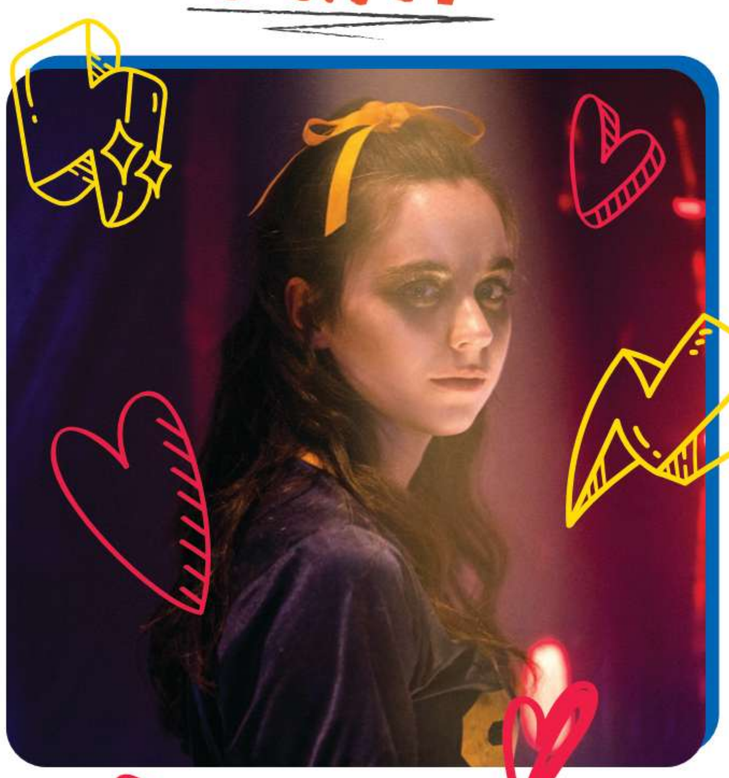
Class Clown & Best Storyteller

Thanks for joining me, Van

Misty Quigley

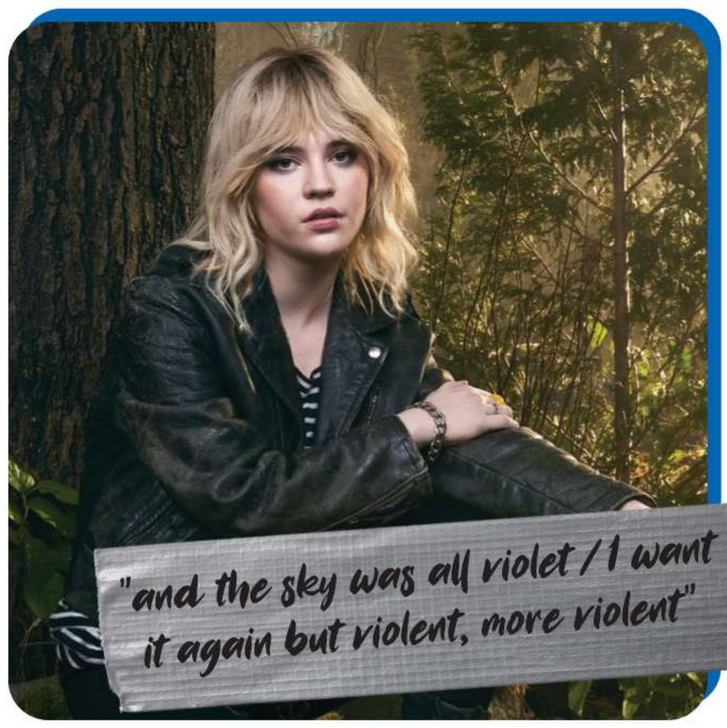
Most Likely To Make A New Friend

RLY??



Callie Sadecki

Most Likely To Date Someone
Who's Already Graduated



Natalie "Nat" Scatorccio

Most Likely To Lie To You For
Your Own Good

Shauna Shipman

Most Likely To Throw The First Punch

Always here to lend an ear! – Shauna

Taissa Turner

Most Two-Faced

WTF.??

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHOWTIME

STAFF

Lisa
Everyone's Fave Cool, Young Teacher!!

Paul
Most Crushable Teacher

Ashley Lyle
Most Likely To Read Your Tarot

Lottie Matthews
Most Likely To Start A Cult Again

Bart Nickerson
Most Likely To Reference *Eddie And The Cruisers II*

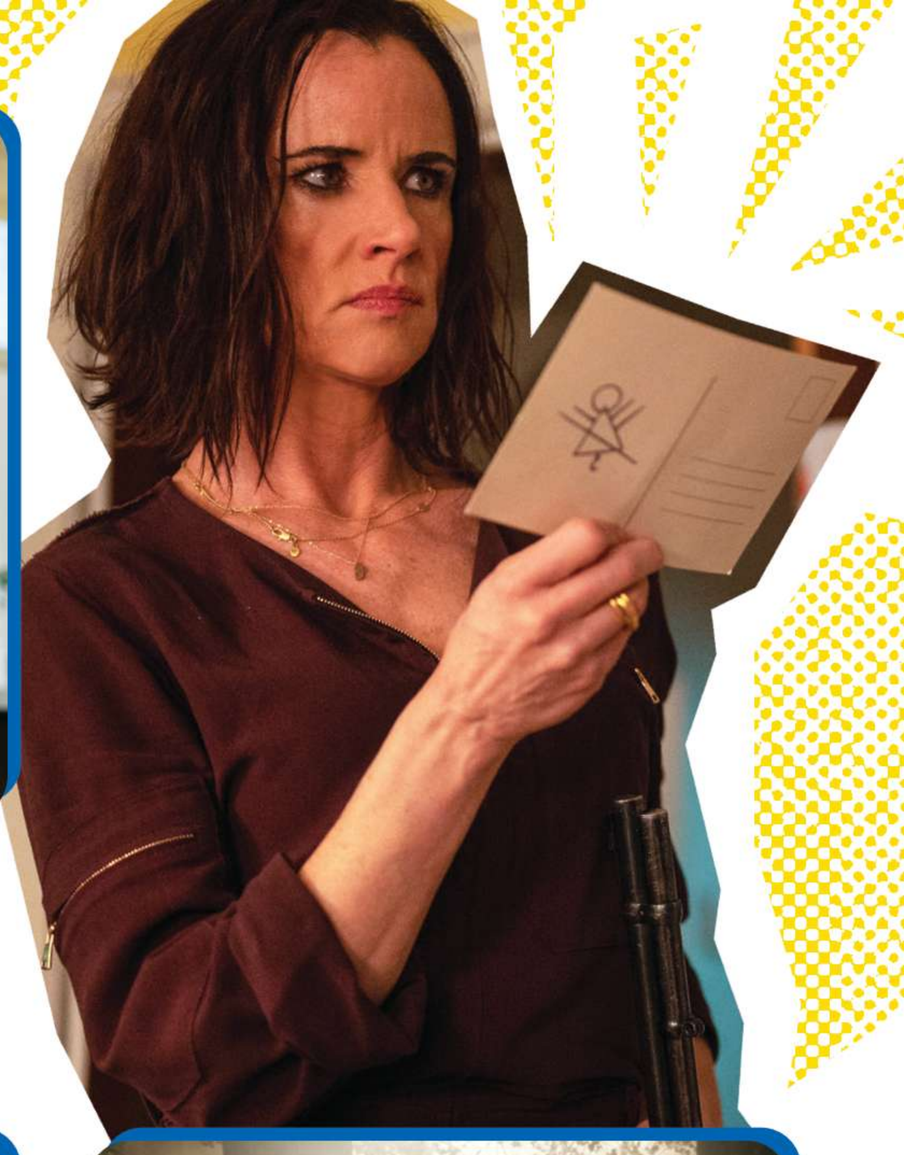
DUH!

Vanessa Palmer

Most Likely To Be On A
Bar Trivia Team

Misty Quigley

Most Likely To Have Trust Issues



Jeff Sadecki

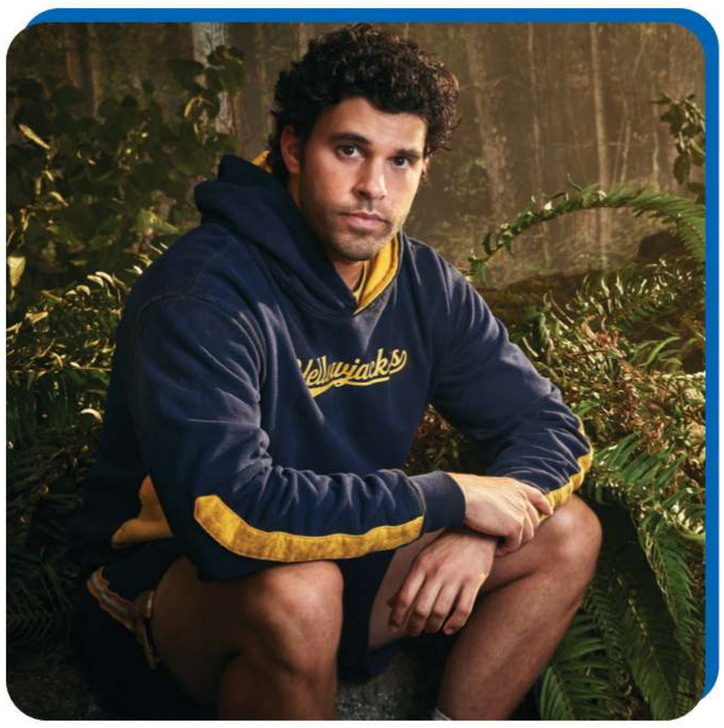
Most Likely To Get In Over His Head

Shauna Sadecki

Most Likely To Get Her Groove Back

Natalie Scatorccio

Most Likely To Become A Lover,
Not A Fighter

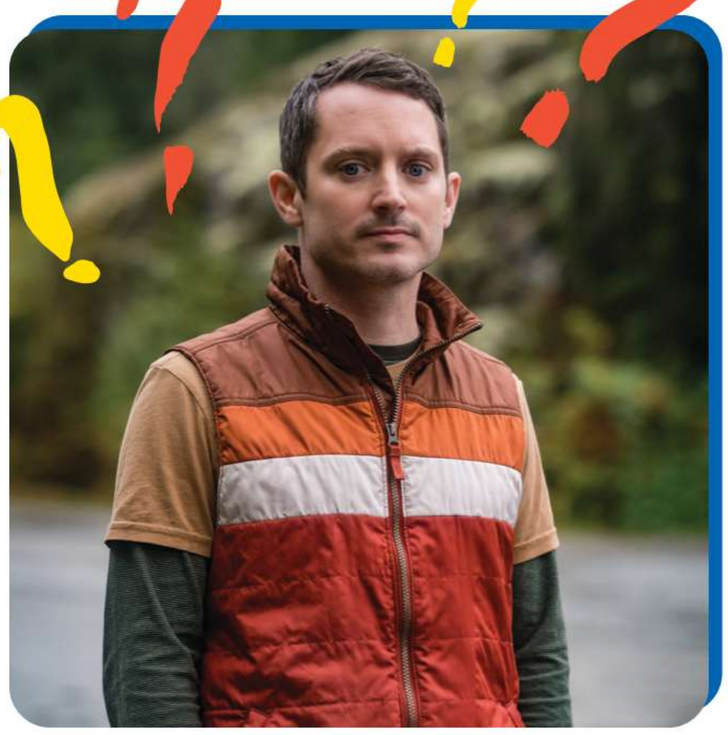


Ben Scott

Biggest Daydream Believer

Taissa Turner

Most Likely To Be Disbarred



Walter

Most Unique

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHOWTIME

Yellowjackets HIVE rise up!!!

SPOILERS & SUBTLETY

BOSTON STRANGLER

BY JULIE LESHANE AND DAVID DASTMALCHIAN

Building characters is a strange and complicated journey for me. I often construct a performance from the outside in. For Matt Ruskin's *Boston Strangler*, having the knowledge of Albert DeSalvo's distinctive presence was an incredible way into the performance, and communicating with Ruskin and makeup artist Julie LeShane from the beginning was massively helpful to the journey. – DD

We didn't want to slap on the exact replica of Albert's nose, but to find a delicate balance that helped transform David into the character, using silicone prosthetic face alterations sculpted by DYAD Make-up & FX Studio. We came to the conclusion early on that we didn't want the nose to have a bulbous tip but more of a refined shape. Making subtle strategic changes that balanced his face was the key. It's very easy to go overboard. – JL

There's no denying Albert's specific nose. It was part of him. We didn't want it to be distracting, but absolutely needed to craft something that helped inform his presence, his insecurities and even the way his (and ultimately my) voice was impacted by the resonance of such a specific nose shape. – DD

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JULIE LESHANE

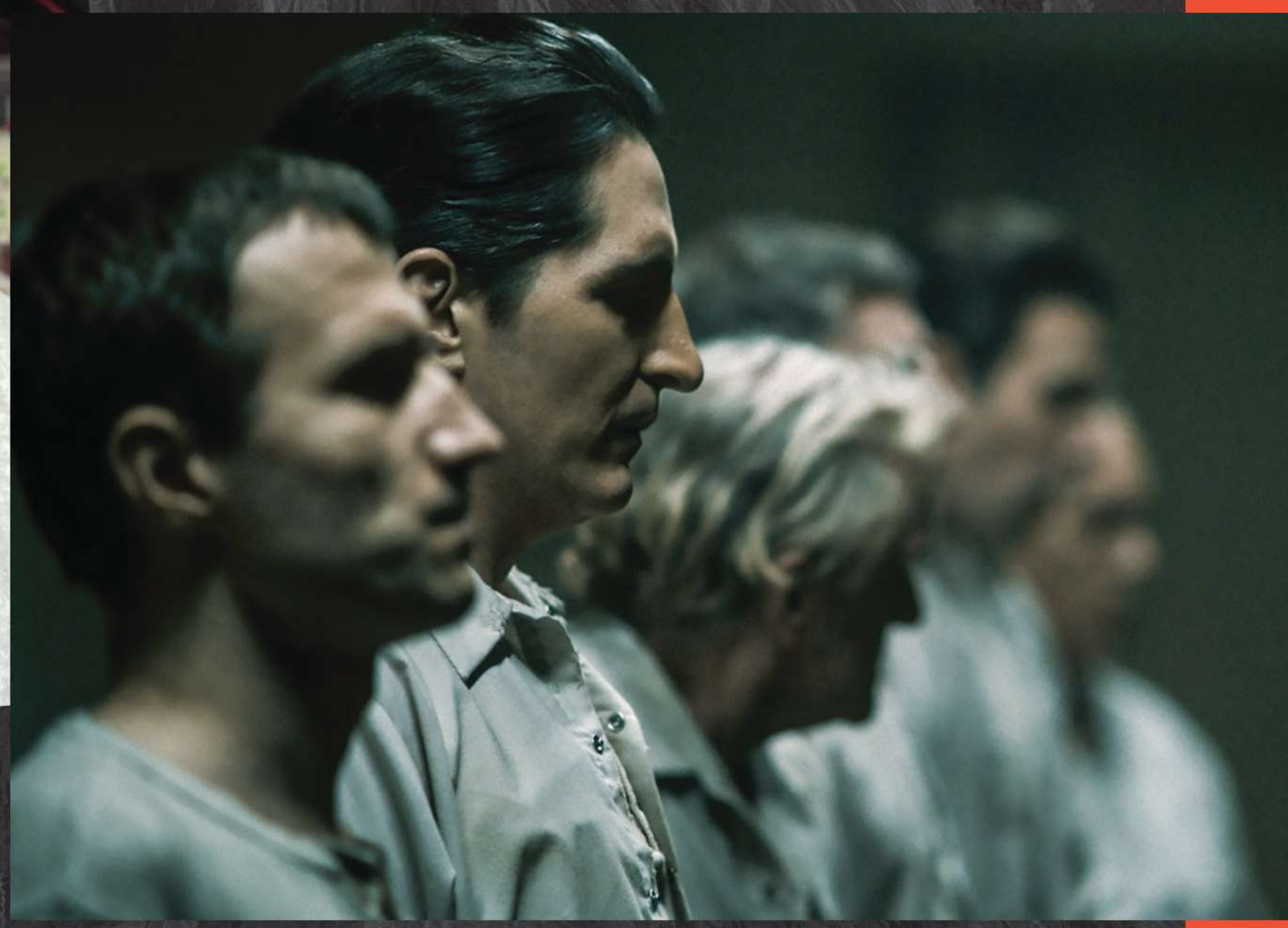
To save time, David at some points had three artists working on him. My makeup keys – Melinda Abreu and Claudia Moriel – tag-teamed some days in altering David's ears as Hair Department Head Frank Barbosa finished his hair. – JL

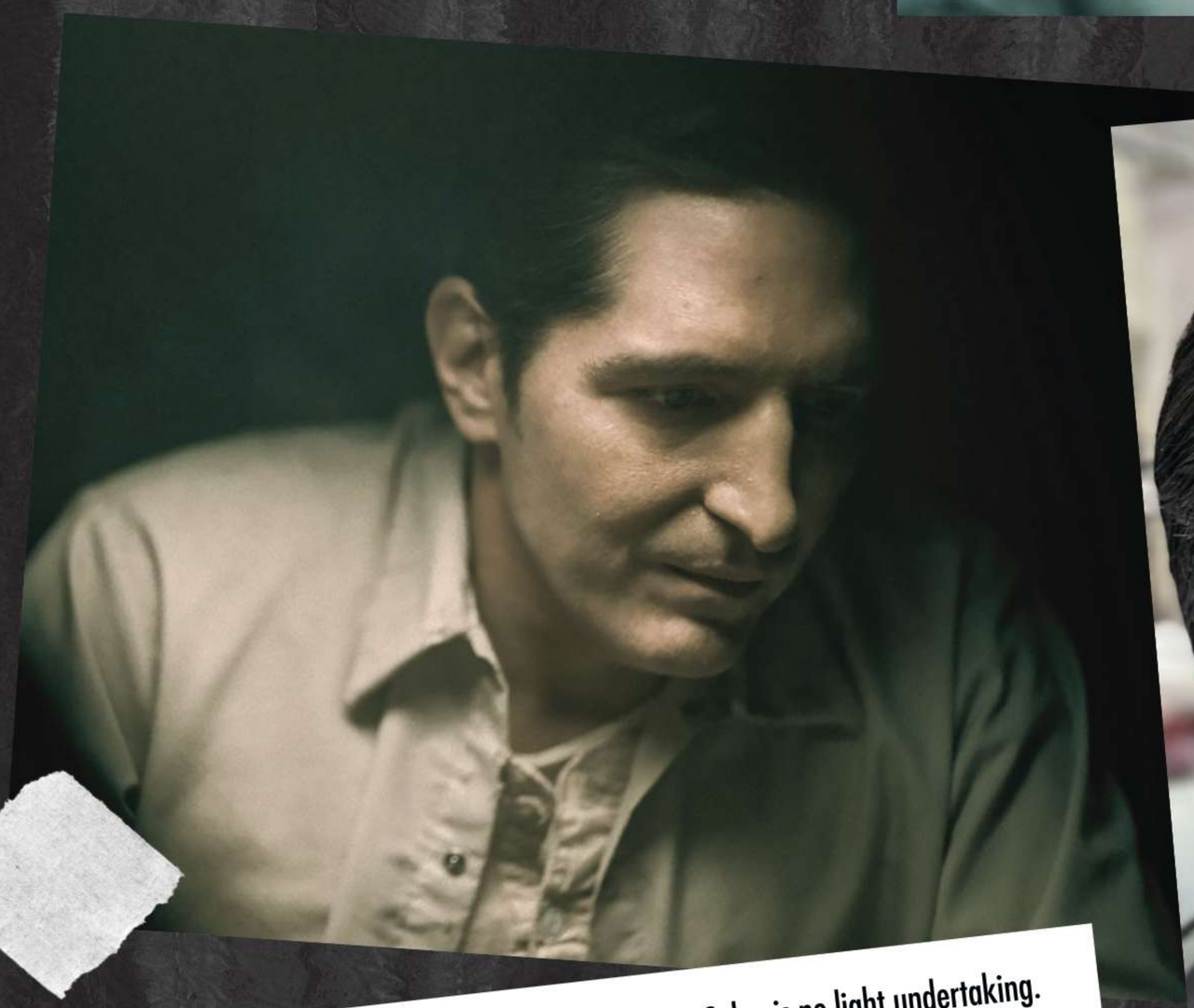
I have always dreamed of a life in acting that would reflect some of the work Lon Chaney gave the world during his career. A massive character makeup all the way to a subtle physical modification can have a powerful impact on an actor's work. It was such a gift to have Julie's artistry, specificity and passion for makeup to help me bring this very complicated man to life. – DD

David was such a dream to work with. We immediately bonded when he walked into the trailer for the first time wearing a FANGORIA sweater. It's always wonderful when you have someone that's into the whole process and very patient and self-aware of the prosthetic. David's character design was a collaborative effort between David, the director and me. – JL

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JULIE LESHANE AND 20TH CENTURY STUDIOS

The beauty of this makeup design lies in subtlety. It's a different application from a creature or injury makeup. The goal wasn't to completely change the actor's face but combine characteristics of Albert's face onto David's facial anatomy, almost like metamorphing them together. At the end of the day you want the effect to take place without anyone actually noticing a drastic change being made. – JL





Playing a role like Albert DeSalvo is no light undertaking. It's a very sad and demanding place to explore. But being in Julie's makeup chair every morning and seeing myself transform in the mirror was so wonderfully informative to this experience. – DD

THAT TIME A CHIODO BROTHER MET KING KONG

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD

When producer Dino De Laurentiis and Paramount Pictures announced their remake of *King Kong* a year in advance of its December 1976 release, it sparked quite a bit of controversy. Remakes of past classics weren't new even back then, but this one especially touched a nerve with devotees of the 1933 original. Both fans and critics decried this treading on sacred ground; some even circulated flyers and carried protest signs at movie conventions reading "Don't rape the ape!"

A poster released at the time indicated at least one new direction the new *Kong* was taking: It depicted the giant gorilla standing astride the twin towers of the World Trade Center — which had opened in 1973 to overtake the first *Kong*'s Empire State Building as the city's, and the world's, tallest buildings—battling jet fighters. (As it happened, this was inaccurate in two different ways: the movie's Kong has to jump between the towers, and he actually battles helicopters.) This alteration inspired protestors of its own, including a group of men who donned ape suits and expressed their displeasure on the Empire State Building's observation roof.

Also sticking in the craws of many: This *Kong* would not be employing the stop-motion animation that so memorably brought the titular monster to life in the '33 film. Instead, De Laurentiis repeatedly touted a 40-foot-tall, six-and-a-half-ton mechanical mockup constructed by Carlo Rambaldi and Glen Robinson, but the crew could never get the Kong-bot to work properly, and it only appears in about 15 seconds of footage in the final cut. For the rest, Kong is played by makeup master Rick Baker in a suit and mask he created, with Rambaldi helping out on the facial mechanicals. Despite his key role in bringing Kong to life, Baker is acknowledged on screen only for "special contributions" while Rambaldi and Robinson get the bulk of the credit. (When *King Kong* won a Special Achievement Academy Award for Best Visual Effects, the statuettes went to Rambaldi, Robinson and Frank Van der Veer, with Baker left out; famed stop-motion artist Jim Danforth resigned from the Academy in protest.)

There was another full-sized Kong that received a little bit more screen time in *King Kong*. A Styrofoam, rubber and horsehair version was placed in the World Trade Center plaza for three nights of shooting in June '76, for the climactic scenes following Kong's death plunge. In addition to around 500 extras hired to play soldiers, cops and reporters, the production solicited New Yorkers to join the crowd via ads the previous week in local newspapers. One of the people who answered the call was a recent Pratt Institute graduate who, in a bit of irony, would later become celebrated for his stop-motion work: Charles Chiodo, one of the trio of Chiodo Brothers whose résumé of cult favorites ranges from *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*'s Large Marge to *Killer Klowns from Outer Space* to last year's *Marcel the Shell With Shoes On*.

"I was working in New York City at ABC News in 1976," Chiodo recalls, "when they advertised that they were shooting the finale at the World Trade Center, and they invited New Yorkers to come down and participate. So of course, I went there — and of course, I was stupid and didn't bring a camera, 'cause there were no cell phones or home video at the time, and I didn't have a 35mm camera handy. I remember walking into the plaza between the two massive towers: There were several cameras all over the place, and armored vehicles and Army guys with machine guns, and in the center, there was King Kong lying on cracked cement at the base of the towers. Since I was a monster fan from childhood, it was a surreal moment to see that, because my first impression was that it was real."

Come
and see
King Kong
You are invited to participate
in the filming of the finale
of the spectacular
Dino De Laurentiis production
of "King Kong" at the
World Trade Center Plaza
on June 21, 22, 23
from 9:00 PM until dawn.
Participation will be limited to
a maximum of 5,000 persons.

The movie's two human stars, Jeff Bridges and Jessica Lange, were also on hand. "They weren't in the shots," Chiodo says. "They just came out to say hi and wave to the crowd. There were hundreds and hundreds of people there, and the ADs started giving us direction. They instructed us that Kong had just fallen off the World Trade Center, and that we were to gradually and sporadically enter the plaza, like one, two, three, and then build up and fill the space. They told us not to look or wave at the cameras, because they would not be able to use the take if we did. One of them told us, 'Just keep your eyes on King Kong; remember, he's just fallen, and you just heard about it and you're arriving at the scene. On "Action," just enter the plaza.' He called 'Action,' and the first thing people did was *run* en masse to King Kong! And he went, 'No, no, no! Do it again, come in a little bit at a time!'

"They didn't have enough ADs to control everybody, like, 'OK, you go, then this group goes'; they just relied on us to do it. And New Yorkers don't listen anyway! They did it again, and eventually got some slow stuff they could use in the movie. So then they were getting shots of the crowd, and again it was like, 'Just don't look at the cameras.' And the first thing after he said 'Action,' everybody got in front of the cameras and started going, 'Woo-hoo-hoo!' and waving and stuff like that. And they just kept rolling. I could tell the guy was disappointed that the directions weren't being followed."

Nonetheless, the crew got the shots they needed, with the studio even thanking the city, its citizens and public servants in follow-up newspaper ads. There was a bit of disappointment in store for Chiodo, though: "I waited for the film to come out, and then when I saw it, the scene I was in was only used as the end credits were rolling!" 💀

By Scott Wampler

THE NIGHT FLIER
STILL CRUISING UNDER THE RADAR

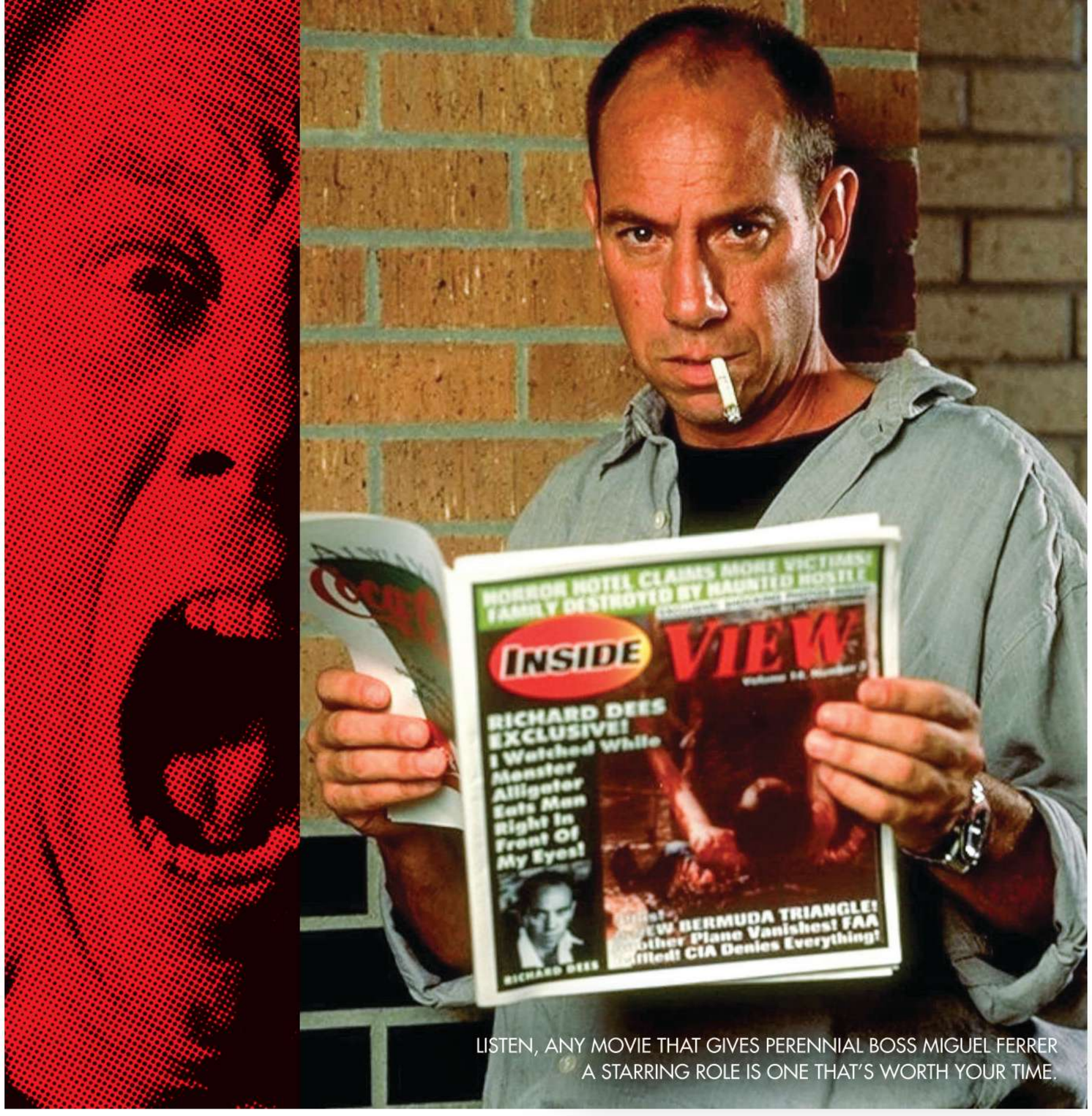
OPEN UP! MARK PAVIA'S *THE NIGHT FLIER* IS AN ACQUIRED TASTE, BUT THE KINGCAST HAS ACQUIRED IT.

THE KINGCAST, the Stephen King-themed podcast I host alongside my esteemed colleague Eric Vespe, is just a few months away from entering its third year in operation. To date, we have produced over 250 episodes of the show, a figure which represents hundreds of hours of conversation revolving around dozens upon dozens of King-penned titles, from TV episodes to short stories, from novels to big-budget feature film adaptations. If we were Stephen King fanatics *before* starting this podcast, well, it might now be more appropriate to identify ourselves as something closer to experts. Spend that much time laser-focused on any single topic, it's all but guaranteed to happen.

Of course, we'd be reluctant to admit as much to your face. Saying you're an "expert" feels like a brag, even if it's probably true, and we're still learning something new every time we sit down to record an episode of the show. Sometimes it's an obscure bit of trivia we'd never heard before, or an interesting little tidbit about this or that production that simply hadn't come up in our previous research. Sometimes a revelation arrives in the form of a guest regaling us with a highly-specific take on a major King title that we never would've arrived at if left to our own devices. In short, there's no actual ceiling to the process of learning.

That said, there are areas of expertise we feel more confident in than others, and when it comes to knowing which King adaptations are worth your hard-earned free time versus those which are decidedly not, we feel very confident, indeed. That's good news, too, because rarely a day will go by without someone asking us to make a few King recommendations. There are certain novels we like to point people towards (the criminally undervalued *Revival* being chief among them), short stories we're truly nuts about ("The Jaunt," "Crouch End"), and then there are the movies. Of course we'll happily suggest you watch all the classic Stephen King bangers – *The Shining*, *Carrie*, *Misery*, *The Dead Zone*, to name just a few – but one film we frequently recommend has, over time, proven to be somewhat controversial: 1997's *The Night Flier*.

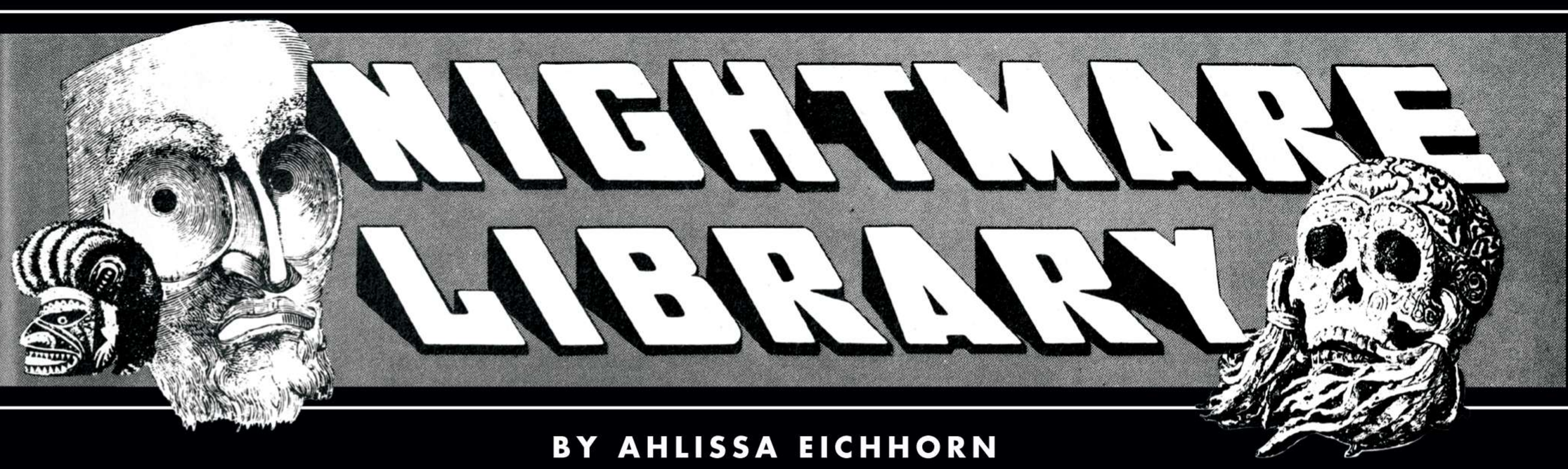
Directed by Mark Pavia, *The Night Flier* is a sleazy fever dream of a movie that follows a jaded tabloid reporter named Richard Dees (Miguel Ferrer, in a rare lead performance) hot on the trail of a vampire who… well, the vampire flies himself everywhere via private plane, presumably to make himself harder to capture (let's not spend too much time dwelling on the logic of this; we'll be here all day). The whole movie's shot like a 3AM soft-core porno you'd see on Cinemax circa 1993, seems determined to make as many of its characters as unlikable as humanly possible, and – in a most unexpected turn of events – eventually careens straight into Mario Bava territory in its final act. Described in that way, it is perhaps unsurprising that this has proven to be a controversial recommendation amongst those who come to us seeking guidance.


HORROR HOTEL CLAIMS MORE VICTIMS!
FAMILY DESTROYED BY HAUNTED HOTEL!
INSIDE VIEW
RICHARD DEES EXCLUSIVE! I Watched While Monster Alligator Eats Man Right In Front Of My Eyes!
RICHARD DEES
LISTEN, ANY MOVIE THAT GIVES PERENNIAL BOSS MIGUEL FERRER A STARRING ROLE IS ONE THAT'S WORTH YOUR TIME.

But for those willing to give themselves over to *The Night Flier*'s particularly bizarre blend of sweaty, surreal vampire hijinks, there's plenty more to consider. That Mario Bava-inspired sequence is genuinely well-executed. That rare lead performance from Miguel Ferrer is not only a fun addition to the legendary character actor's filmography, but also wildly entertaining in its absolute commitment to presenting Richard Dees as the most furious man on the planet. The design on the titular bloodsucker is, admittedly, hampered by what was obviously a relatively limited budget, but you will never, ever forget what that thing looks like with its gaping maw stretched wide once you've witnessed it. There's also a delightfully *gritty* feeling to the whole thing, the sense that – for as inexplicable as this story and movie can be – it's still rooted in something like the real world (specifically, the "real world" of the mid-'90s).

The Night Flier is not a critically-acclaimed movie, nor was it a success at the box office (it landed in theaters months after debuting on HBO, though one suspects this probably wasn't what kept Pavia's film from becoming a blockbuster), nor is it particularly popular among horror fans or King nerds. But it is – unlike some other Stephen King adaptations, remakes, or spin-offs we could name – never boring. Still flying mostly under the radar all these years later and certainly an acquired taste, *The Night Flier* is nevertheless a King recommendation THE KINGCAST will continue to make until we are certain that every man, woman, and child in the world has seen it. Go ahead and trust us on this – we're debatably experts. 💀

You can listen to Scott Wampler (@ScottWamplerRIP) and Eric Vespe (@EricVespe) every Wednesday on THE KINGCAST (@Kingcast19), a Stephen King podcast for Stephen King obsessives, brought to you by the FANGORIA Podcast Network.



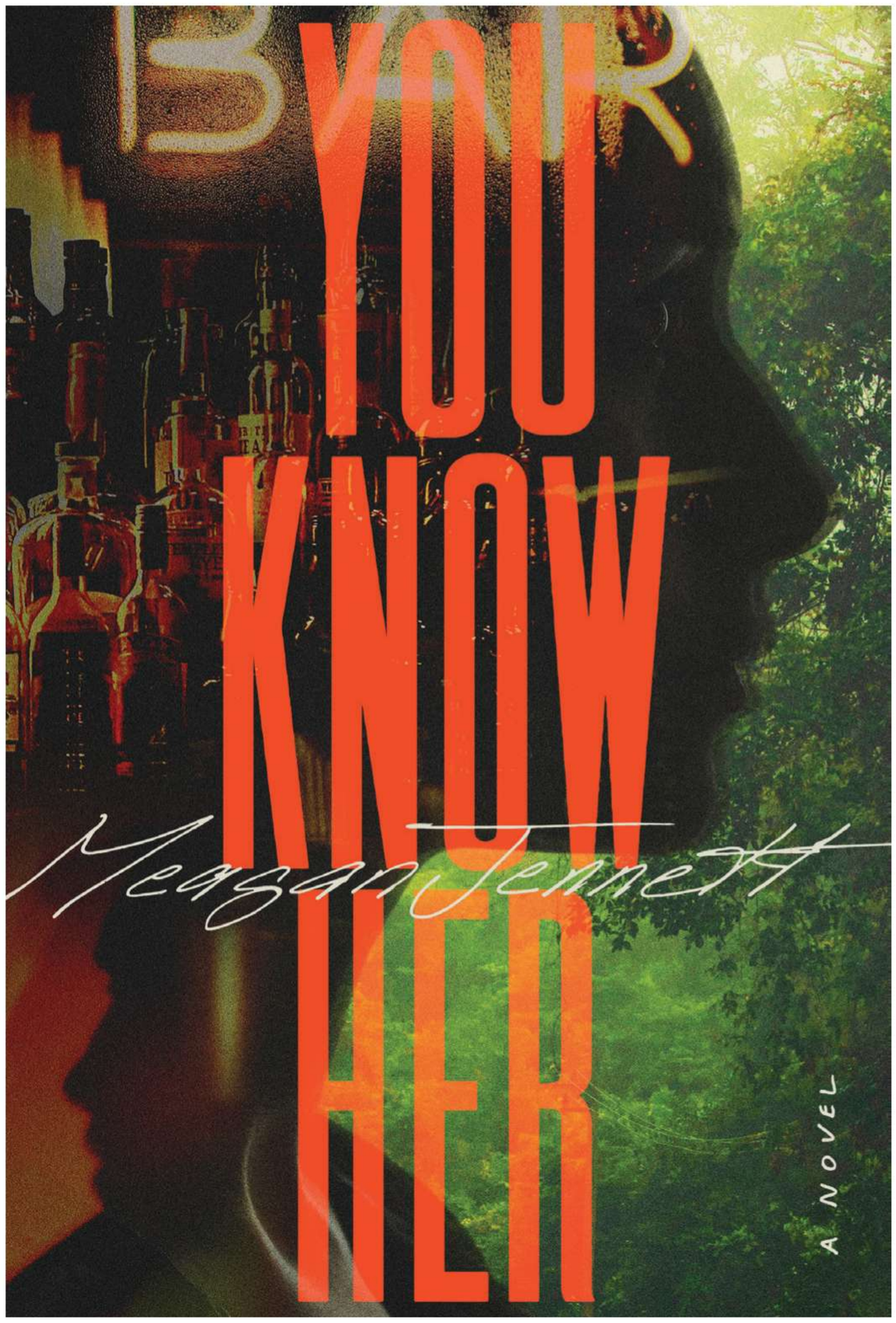
BY AHLISSA EICHHORN

YOU KNOW HER

DUE OUT:
4/04/2023

AUTHOR:
Meagan Jennett

PUBLISHER:
MCD Books



You Know Her is a story of female rage told from the perspective of two different women. One is Nora, a police officer tracking the person responsible for the barrage of male corpses in town. The other is Sophie, the enigmatic bartender who killed every single one of them. As Nora works within a system designed against her, Sophie fully leans into her metamorphosis and wills their paths to cross. The two form a loose camaraderie, while the feeling that a woman is to blame for these murders overtakes Nora's every thought.

Ex-bartender and first-time novelist Meagan Jennett looked to her upbringing when crafting this lyrical Southern Gothic thriller:

"Not only did I grow up exposed to Appalachian murder ballads and ghost stories, but the area I lived and played in was host to some horrific crimes. My own life, too, has been touched by male violence against women. Working in bars, you get used to it, which sounds insane to me now. A friend of mine was murdered by her husband just a few months after I began working on this novel, which, if anything, fueled my desire to finish it. But, maybe ultimately, what gave birth to this idea was a late-night conversation with a chef I used to work for. He told me, and I think it's true, 'Meagan, men are terrified of women.' I believe very much in the power of women – there are so many inspiring examples throughout history of them saying, 'Enough,' and standing up for themselves. I guess I wanted to see what would happen if I unleashed Sophie."

As the author puts it, Sophie, the unnerving antagonist, "practices a curdled form of feminism." With the character mutating into a serial killer right before the reader's eyes, much research had to go into capturing this change. Jennett's family of nurses came in handy for the grittier, more clinical questions, as did her education in massage therapy.

"One of the things that struck me about massage school is how much time you spend learning how not to touch someone, the damage you can do if you put too much pressure in the wrong spot. That stuck with me – massage therapists exist to ease pain, but given the right circumstances, they can actually really harm or even kill someone. I also spent far too many hours listening to true crime podcasts, particularly *My Favorite Murder*, and watching every serial killer documentary I could find (thank you, Joe Berlinger!)."

But what true crime entertainment often surmises is "women kill for two things – love and money." *You Know Her* picks at that narrative by contrasting these two characters, each receiving their share of abuse. While protagonist Nora refuses to lose sight of herself, Sophie is an exhibition of moral decay, worn down and pushed much too far. Their actions are opposite, but they empathize with each other's experiences.

"I learned in my research and have witnessed in my own life that anyone can be cruel. Violence and manipulation know no gender. Because of that, I try to take a little of Nora's gentleness and thoughtfulness into my own life."

FURY AND _SCORN_ ARE KEYWORDS FOR WOMEN LOSING THEIR SHIT.

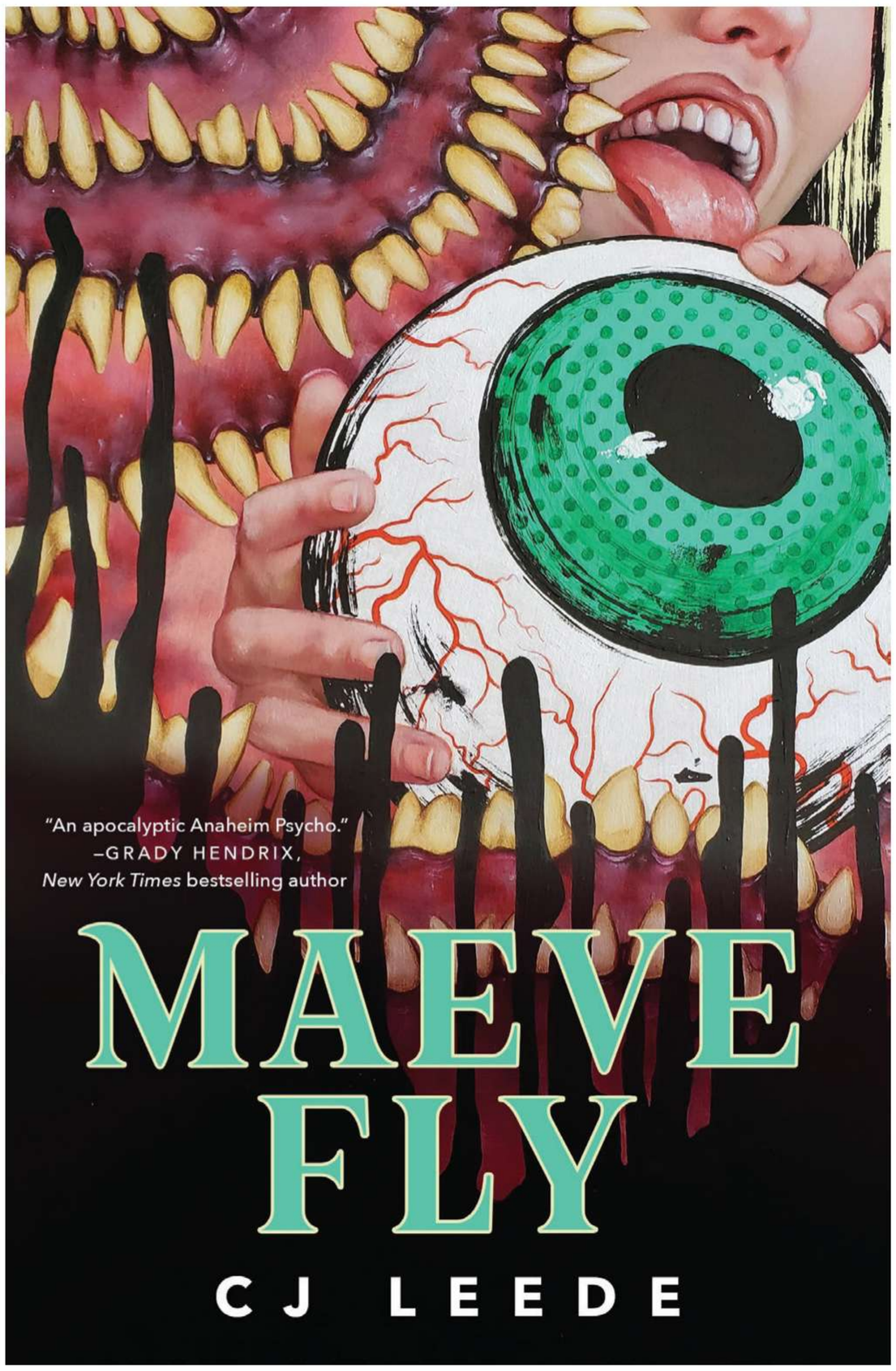
But what if these flash-pan emotions don't cut it in horror anymore? In this edition of the Nightmare Library, we explore the representation of female villains through two outstanding novels from fresh, defined voices. Each is steadfast in their approach, giving insight into how their killer characters belong on this subgenre's growing roster of fiends.

MAEVE FLY

DUE OUT:
6/06/2023

AUTHOR:
CJ Leede

PUBLISHER:
Tor Nightfire



Pop culture's definition of "disturbing" gets murkier as the years go on, but *Maeve Fly* has no problem keeping up with the times. This cynically fun tribute to perverse literature, Halloween, music, and bizarro Los Angeles revolves around Maeve, an amusement park princess by day and a lone wolf by night. Life is about blending in until she's introduced to her friend's brother, and Maeve feels seen for the first time. The encounter is an awakening of sorts, leading to her shrugging on a new persona that makes the Sunset Strip a bit weirder and much bloodier.

Author CJ Leede relays that the reaction to her first book so far has been "wild." Despite pull quotes declaring it a newfound *American Psycho*, beta readers are still surprisingly taken aback by the violent and sexual content in *Maeve Fly*.

"Soon after the book sold, we were shopping the option for TV/film, and I got a meeting with a network that I was totally freaking out over. So I show up on this Zoom, and I'm shaking, so nervous and so new to all of this, and there are nine people on screen that I don't know. And within the first few minutes, one of them says, 'Do you feel with this book that you're just glorifying violence?' Needless to say, the meeting was a quick one."

Some have even marked the book as anti-feminist and equated the author to a bully. "I think, in general, a moralizing reader looking for a protagonist to make ethically sound choices is just not going to like the book, or really any of my writing. And I feel passionate about my brand of female empowerment, one in which we are primarily *not* defined by our sex, and people are just people who get to do whatever they want to do on an even playing field."

These criticisms lose sight of the fact that *Maeve Fly* was penned with the utmost care. Leede moved from New York to California during the genesis of this book and channeled feelings of uncertainty and panic into the creation of Maeve. While many factors in the story had to come from within, the majority was uncharted territory for the author.

"The truth is that I grew to love these things in the process of writing them. They were mostly chosen for the narrative I had in mind, and I found ways to love them as I went along so that Maeve could love them authentically. I feel very strongly that if we stare for long enough at anything and try to understand it from all angles, there is nowhere to go except to fall in love."

This protagonist does awful, fucked-up things but remains vulnerable to the reader. You can see her pain and stand aghast at her behavior all at once, making for that moralistic head trip every horror fan craves. Look beyond the easy comparisons, and you'll find a straightforward message – a female character can be a monster in her own right without bearing the victim cross or leading a feminist cause.

"I put out a piece of art that meant something to me, and I hope some people love it. And anyone who hates it, well, Maeve loves to hate, and there's fun in that, too."

Contributors' Crypt

Below are IG handles for some of this issue's contributors. Don't make it weird!

Brianna Ashby - @brianna_ashby

Meredith Borders - @mereborders

Kalyn Corrigan - @kalyncorrigan

Barbara Crampton - @barbaracrampton

David Dastmalchian - @dastmalchian

Matt Donato - @donatobomb

Ahlissa Eichhorn - @hauntedbydeadlines

Brittany Knupper - @missgeorgiaoqueef

Julie LeShane - @j.leshane

Samantha McLaren - @themeatispeople

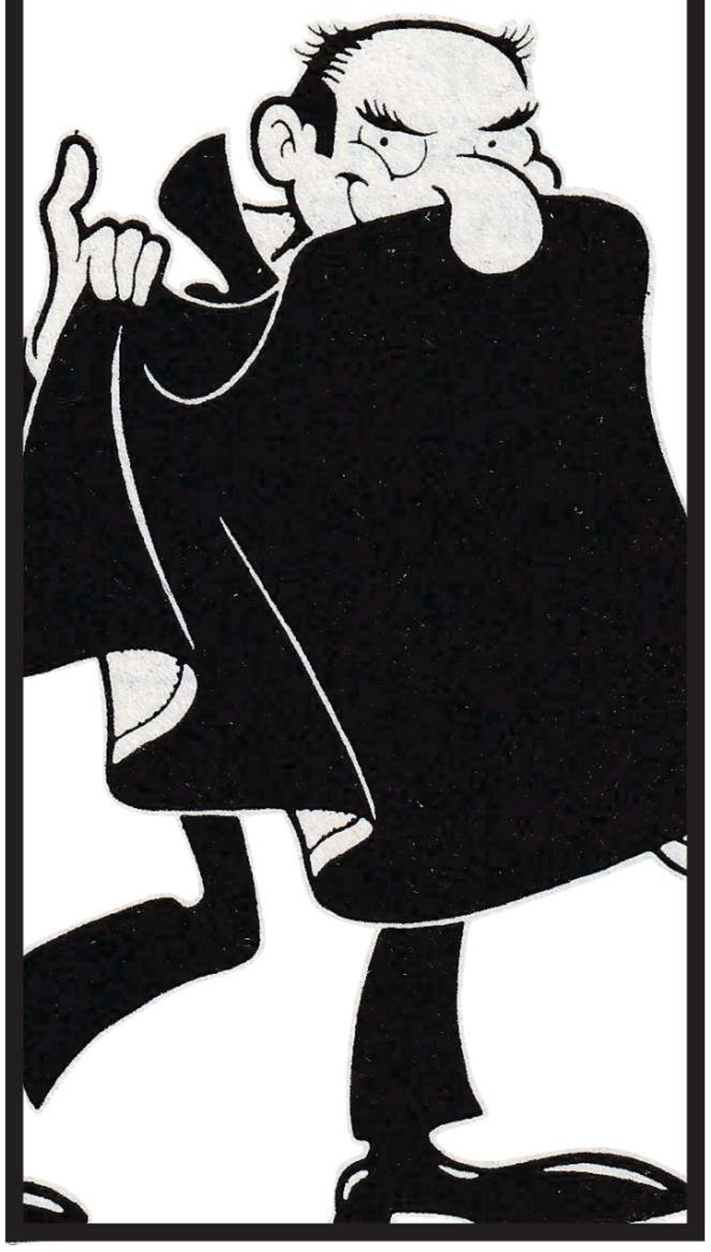
Ve Neill - @therealve

Keith Phipps - @kphipps3000

Scott Wampler - @mayorofdoorcity

Things to Come

Summer is upon us, so get ready to TALK TO ME about the LAST VOYAGE OF THE DEMETER, you SATANIC HISPANICS! (But also, go outside and get some fresh air and sunshine.)



CLASSIFIED AD VAULT

Brittany Knupper is one of those rare individuals you never think could exist in Los Angeles. Her heart is huge and her relentless positive spirit is something to aspire to have. - Micheline Pitt

Brittany Knupper is one of the smartest people I've ever met to do some of the stupidest things I've ever seen on stage. Who else could make the sand worm from DUNE sexy? The world is a better place knowing she's around to make us laugh. Go Britt!!! - Chad Jones

Brittany, I'm in awe of your strength (and your wonderful sense of humor) as you continue to beat the Big C into a bloody pulp. Sending you much love, and cheering you on from the cheap seats. - Duane Swierczynski

Brittany, I'm putting all my money on you. But please don't make this about my compulsive gambling. - Julie Klausner

Thanks for your humorous, glamorous and graceful presence at our booth, in these pages and in our lives. And thanks for coming with me to the Dragula Ball! <3 - PN

Thanks for taking Phil to the Dragula Ball :) - AN

Here's to many years of badassery to come! Sending you much love and strength. - Brianna Ashby

Sending strength and support to a true slayer. You've got this! - Richard Newby

Best wishes and inappropriate side-eyeing from your favorite rabbi's daughter in San Francisco who isn't named Rachel. You are the light of my Frankenstein place and I love you so much - Avital Wolf

Brittany, your spirit is the only thing on this earth more beautiful than your burlesque get-up as Hans Gruber. You are an exceptional thief of hearts. - Amy Nicholson

Sending you all the positive vibes to kick cancer's ass! - Kathryn Olvera

To one of the strongest people I've ever met, thank you for the inspiration and so proud of you for fighting against true body horror and being such a bloody badass! Love you! - Joe Lynch

We love you, Brittany!! All our love to you and Devin. Love, Kevin and Tricia Biegel

Brittany - We've never met, but your resolve, your sense of humor, and your genius radiate throughout the internet and beyond. Wishing you only the best in recovery! Thank you for sharing your vulnerability and strength! - Blayne Waterloo

Rock on, superstar. The future's so bright you best be wearing shades. Wishing you all the luck in the world. - Julia Marchese

To my favorite DEEP BLUE SEA and cat enthusiast: you're a badass and I pity whatever tries to prove otherwise. - Brian Collins

Kindness, enthusiasm and positivity are in ever shorter supply these days, but Britt possesses so much of all three that she makes everyone around her better, just with her presence. Julie and I send all of that — and a whole lot of love — back to her with the hope she'll continue to get stronger and healthier in the days and weeks to come, so we can all celebrate one another together, in person! - Todd Gilchrist

Sondheim said, "Perpetual anticipation is good for the soul, but it's bad for the heart." Wishing you many, many days of certainty and knocking anticipation back to the rearview soon, you wild and wonderful woman. xoxo, BJ Colangelo

Brittany - Sending you lots of love and strength. Kick cancer's ass! - Chris McKay

Brittany, the only thing more impressive than your strength is the fervor of your fandom. The Fango Family is richer for having you in it. - Drew McWeeny

Some lights shine so bright and true they warm the world around them, and Britt, your sparkle is the strongest around. - Jen Yamato

From karaoke to kinship, my friend Britt is one of the strongest and beautiful people I know inside and out. Cheers to a speedy recovery! Xo - Rachel Messick

Brittany, your singular humor, beauty, and spirit shine no matter what life throws your way. I am in awe of you. Love, Amanda Zubillaga

Love unlimited to the greatest gore-gore girl of them all. You're a goddamn superstar, Brittany. You don't need me to tell you to keep fighting. It's just what you do. - Jeremy Smith

Brittany - I am in awe and are inspired by the graceful way you carry yourself in the face of adversity. Wishing you good health and much happiness. - Brian Drew

From one of the founding members of the exclusive teeny tiny bifocal boys club, you've got this! - Julian Hilliard

Here's to Britt, whose beauty and warmth is only matched by Wesley Crusher's rainbow sweater! xoxo Jordan Hoffman

Britt - With strength and grace and awe, we love you and are honored to journey with you. As our good pal Q once said, "It's not safe out here. It's wondrous, with treasures to satiate desires both subtle and gross; but it's not for the timid." - Noah

B! I'm so lucky to have found you as a friend 25 years ago amongst the insanity of a nice town with normal people and even luckier to continue to know the incredibly strong person you are today. Heal up quick so we can get back to not making the best fake podcast to ever not exist, Short Dudes in Leather. Xoxo Megan

Brittany, you are such a bright light. Your drive, passion, and talent is an inspiration to us all. Sending love! - Gory Cory

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DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY SEAN MCDANIEL · EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS ERIC KLEIFIELD LUKE LABEAU BONNER BELLEW JUSTIN BROWN MARY POILEY

PRODUCED BY SCOTT POILEY AND DAN CLIFTON · WRITTEN BY ANTHONY DIBLASI & SCOTT POILEY · DIRECTED BY ANTHONY DIBLASI

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IN THEATERS MARCH 31